



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

23498.36.4

**HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY**



**THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
CLASS OF 1882
OF NEW YORK**

• •
1918

ALFRED THE GREAT

IN

ATHELNAY.

0

ALFRED THE GREAT

IN

ATHELNAY.

AN

HISTORICAL PLAY;

WITH A

PRELIMINARY SCENE.

BY

VISCOUNT STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE, P.C., K.G., G.C.B.

LONDON:

1875

22 . 3 . 4

TO THE
EVER-HONOURED MEMORY
OF
HIS LATE ROYAL HIGHNESS
ALBERT,
THE PRINCE CONSORT,
IN JUST ADMIRATION
OF
HIS HIGH INTELLECTUAL QUALITIES,
HIS RARE MORAL VIRTUES,
AND HIS TRUE PUBLIC SPIRIT,
THIS DRAMATIC RECORD
OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF OUR GREATEST SAXON KING
IS
REVERENTIALLY INSCRIBED.

. . . "si qua fata aspera rumpas,

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
1918

. . . "si qua fata aspera rumpas,
Tu Marcellus eris. Manibus date lilia plenis;
Purpureos spargam flores, animamque nepotis
His saltèm accumulem donis."

ÆNEID. lib. vi.

Come with full hands, unspotted lilies bring—
Bring all the choicest blossoms of the spring.
These gifts, at least, around him I may strew,
And pay in part the tribute,—all his due.
Alas! for wisdom nipp'd in manhood's bloom,
For knowledge quench'd in death's untimely doom,
For faith well-tried, for honour based on truth,
And duty's rule unwarp'd by fire of youth!
Alas! for love of every noble art,
That lures to peace a warlike nation's heart!
Oh! had thy star prevail'd o'er Fate's decree,
Another Alfred would have lived in thee!

STR. DE R.

NOTICE.

IN treating of individuals who have acquired historical reputation, it has been found difficult to do them full justice without taking into account the age in which they lived and the opinions by which they were surrounded. It was to an impression of this kind that the separate scene which precedes our present Drama owes its existence. Even Alfred's excelling virtues had something to gain by being placed in contrast with the conduct of his countrymen, and still more with that of the contemporary Danes, whose cruel natures had not yet been softened by Christianity.

Framed with this view, the scene in question might fitly have made part of the main Drama, if its insertion there could have been effected without too great a distortion of historic truth. It is thought that the preliminary position which it now occupies may in some degree carry out the original purpose.

The Saxons of Alfred's day were Christians, but this advantage did not always restrain them from indulging their passions to excess. In the circumstances related to the daughter of Ragnor, they did exceptionally what the Danes were in the habit of doing without any special provocation. The constitution of King Alfred's mind evidently raised him at all times above the level of both examples.

OFFS.
W.C.
175.

PRELIMINARY SCENE.

*A Hall in the Palace of RAGNOR LODBRUG, in
Scandinavia.*

Present.—RAGNOR'S three daughters, and a veteran EARL,
lately in his service.

Daughter of Ragnor. Say, noble Earl, our grand
avenging host—

How fares it?—Are its ranks well fill'd ? does thirst
Of Saxon blood e'en more than greed of spoil
Rouse the fierce spirit of our race ? Has he,
Their chief, my brother Ingwar, yet unfurl'd
His gore-stain'd flag ? 'tis time the barks were mann'd,
And all their canvas stretch'd for yon doom'd isle.

Earl. Daughter of Ragnor ! tho' our clime be cold,
The hearts it nurtures burn to lay in dust
Whate'er is alien to their race or creed.
Shame of defeat, revenge, and hate of those

II.

Who by foul means your royal father slew,
Now fire with tenfold rage our harness'd swarms ;
They throng the beach, provoke the sluggish winds,
And crazed by longing fain would leap the seas.

D. of Ragnor. Crazed they may be, but leaps my
heart with theirs ;

Such madness outstrips sense ; methinks, good Earl,
If rumour lie not, you were ever deep
In my lost father's confidence, in arms
His brave companion, and in days of rest
His friend and trusted counsellor.

Earl. 'Tis true,

Fair lady, and my loss, scarce less than yours,
Hath deeply sunk into my bosom's cheer.
His favour was my joy, his trust my pride ;
His daring love of conquest, and his rage,
Unsparring as the whirlwind's ruthless sweep,
Were objects of my wonder mix'd with awe.
And painful as it was, the tribute paid
To my devoted service, when our foes,
Puff'd by his ruin, bade me live to bear

III.

The dismal tidings to his desolate home,
Is my life's glory now,—forgive these drops ;
They fall not oft.

D. of Ragnor. Forgive them ! Ne'er fell tears
In better cause ; mine too in streams would flow,
Did I not hoard them up to feed the springs
Of vengeance here within. Ye Gods ! to think
A pack of yelping curs should have your leave
To worry to the death a Norseman king !
Tell me, brave Earl, how brook'd that lion heart
The spite and bitter mocks, the cruel taunts
Of Olla's minions ?

Earl. Even as his life,
So was its end ; myself can vouch it well.
Tho' deep and dark—dark almost to the touch—
His dungeon snatch'd a scanty dole of air
By a thin grated chink high beyond reach
In the grim dripping wall ; close by that chink
Fast bound, and forced to silence by an arm'd
And threat'ning guard, all horror was I placed. .
The clanking chain, the creaking hinge announced

IV.

Your sire's approach : he seem'd to pause awhile ;
I pictured how he strain'd his searching eyes
To pierce the gloom within ; prison or tomb,
I heard him say, what else could I expect ?
Prison or tomb ! I hail thee as the gate
That opens to Valhalla :—next a tread—
Few steps and firm—close follow'd by a sound
Of pond'rous door swung to with angry force.

D. of Ragnor. Did not his mighty spirit, thus pent in,
Spring forth in flame, and thro' the shatter'd walls,
Burst into light and air ?

Earl. 'Twere like ; but no !
My weak brain reel'd and when it clear'd, oh ! Heavens !
A noisome stench and hisses, as of snakes
Suddenly startled, on my senses smote.
What ! have they dared, I mutely thought, to daunt
By ignominious cruelty a chief
So grandly daring ?—Yet we do the same !
Breathless I listen'd, and from time to time
On the charged air and thro' the sullen chink
There rose a sick'ning groan, and then a word

Of proud defiance—this the conqueror.
 I shudder'd, and, as fancy framed the dream,
 Myself became the helpless occupant
 Of that foul den ; I felt the slimy chill
 Of crawling reptiles, and in moving roused
 The horrid vipers ; did I stretch my hand
 Athwart the murky space,—a rough damp wall
 Opposing crook'd my fingers ; terror soon
 The dreamy spell dissolved, and I awoke ;
 But only woke to catch the stifled moan
 By venom'd fangs from their great victim wrung.

D. of Ragnar. Horror of horrors ! worse almost to hear
 Than to endure ! right bravely earn'd, and borne
 As a crown'd Dane should bear. Go, valiant Earl !
 Urge Hubba ; Ingwar urge at once to spread
 All sail ; the gods are with us ; wind and tide
 Can ne'er be wanting to our keen revenge.
 Sisters, the hour is come ! our hands must weave
 The mystic flag by seers of old design'd :
 Come, weave the plumes of Odin's gifted bird,
 That, drooping now, and now with pride elate,

VI.

Shall warn of peril, or to conquest point.
Sisters ! the web is here; its crimson hue
Has fatal meaning, and ere set of sun
Its weird device must float o'er armèd hosts,
And waive them on to slaughter yet unmatch'd.

The Three Sisters.

From the depths of underground
Comes in sobs a muffled sound,
As of one who writhes in vain,
Agonized by nameless pain ;
Echoing through our father's halls,
Vengeance, sisters ! vengeance calls.

Eldest Daughter.

Work there is for me, for you,
Work of death and hell ;
Some will glory, some will rue,
So we close it well.

Guardians of our northern race,
Ye that look from high !

VII.

Mighty Thor ! whose iron mace-
Strikes but once, be nigh !

Hear us chant our mystic song !
Bless the web we spread !
Never web so broad, so long,
Wrapt the sheeted dead.

Blank the canvas, blank as wide ;
Trace thereon is none ;
Phantoms 'round the margin glide,
Mutt'ring, "*lost and won !*"

Seems it not a battle-field,
Crimson'd o'er with blood,
By the frost of death congeal'd
Where each spearman stood ?

Swiftly, see ! my needle flies,
Light the touch, and true,
Heaving from the level rise
Plumes of sable hue.

Glossy black are crest and wing ;
Sharp the horny beak ;

VIII.

Gleam those eyes as they would sting,
Eager, spite to wreak.

Lo ! the rav'ning bird of Fate,
Herald to the brave !
Wail and woe to foes we hate !
Yawns for them the grave.

Ere the fatal day be won,
Greet our standard, greet !
Loose its folds to wind and sun,
Where the warriors meet.

Every thread is fraught with life ;
High the Raven tow'rs !
Vengeance goads the sons of strife—
All its joy be ours !

[*Curtain falls.*

drop

ALFRED THE GREAT IN ATHELNAY.

Dramatis Personæ.

ALFRED, *King of Wessex.*

GUTHRUN, *Danish King of Mercia.*

ETHELWOLF, *Earl-derman of the Palace.*

NEOT, *a Cornish Bishop.*

ORDOLF, *a Saxon Earl.*

A FOSTER-BROTHER TO THE EARL.

GODWYN, *a Saxon Thane.*

Danish Chiefs.

CEDRIC, *a Saxon Yeoman.*

DANULF, *a Saxon Swineherd.*

SENESCHAL

VALET

CHAMBERLAIN

PORTER

} *in Alfred's Palace.*

GHOST OF ST. CUTHBERT.

ELWITHA, *Alfred's Queen.*

GODWYN'S LADY.

GITHRA, *Danulf's Wife.*

WOLFRIDA, *Daughter of a Sea-king and reputed Sorceress.*

HILDA, *Cedric's Bride.*

Danish Lads.

Saxon Girls.

Sacristan, Verger, Boatman.

Clerks, Soldiers, Peasants.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Open space before the Royal Residence. Saxons
of the middle class and others moving on in groups.*

First Saxon. Good morrow, kinsman ! you look sad ;
I hope
No loss at home disturbs you.

Second Saxon. Out, alas !
What need of household grief ? Can any one
Of Saxon lineage sow the furrow'd field,
Miscall'd his own, nor fear some Danish hand
Will pluck the golden ears ?

Cedric. Why stint you so
The measure of our ills ?—a thousand swords
Each by a thread hang o'er us ; bands, more fierce
Than famish'd wolves, devour our substance ; nay,

Our very wives and maiden daughters hold
Their honour on mere suff'rance.

Second Saxon. Such things were
When Ethelred was king, but in his day
They seem'd less grievous; then the people, strong
In self-reliance, look'd each danger down.
Action then wing'd the hours; hope lived; revenge
Would sweeten now and then our bitter draught.

First Saxon. Most true; and in those days the king
himself
Went forth to battle, and our present lord—
A youth, half-fledged—with such bright valour fought,
That none—his brothers dying—seem'd more fit
To wear the crown, and drive the wolves away.
Beshrew the change! what pagan sorceress
Hath nipp'd so fair a promise?

Second Saxon. Have a care!
We touch the palace: walls, they say, have ears;
And fingers slow to fight may yet be swift
To punish a loose tongue or daring looks.

Cedric. So please you, I can talk with "bated breath,"
 But say my say I must. 'Twere hard to grudge
 The wretch his sole relief. Can worse befall?
 Dark are our homes, and dark th' horizon 'round :
 Our hearts are sick, our hands benumb'd,—the light
 To which all eyes were raised lies swathed in clouds :
 He courts his ease ; makes of his throne a couch ;
 Is felt but in taxation. His loose sword
 Hangs dead,—a leaden sceptre fills his hand.

First Saxon. Extremes are not long-lived, there lives
 my hope.

Sec. Saxon. Agreed. But, see ! 'tis time for us to
 part ;
 Crowds are collecting fast ; what game's a-foot
 I know not ; but, as weapons here and there
 Gleam from amongst them, mischief may ensue,
 And prudence bids away.

Cedric. It may be so ;
 But something more than prudence roots me here.

Go you ; I stay. Whene'er we meet again,
May happier prospects be our theme—farewell !

[FIRST and SECOND retire..

Crowds oft engender incidents. I love
Emotion for itself, and here, perchance,
May find, ere long, wherewith to glut my taste.
Numbers pour in,—the monster grows apace.
What babbling, jostling, shouting !—more anon.

SCENE II.—*A Room in Alfred's Palace.*

*Enter from opposite sides the SENESCHAL and the King's
PERSONAL ATTENDANT, or VALET.*

Seneschal. Well met, good youth ! We meet from
adverse points,
But kindred duties bring us near. How fares
Our gracious master ? None, except his leach,
So placed as you to know his daily state.
We of his household, too, tho' not so nigh,
Perceive a change that warrants fear of worse.

Val. Such fears are groundless ; the King's age
alone

Assures us. Idle fancies oft beget
Ill rumours.

Sen. That may be ; but surely those
Who eat his bread, and serve his hourly needs,
May to his countenance look, and seek relief
From sad forebodings by inquiry ?

Val. Yes ; and I,
Who tend his person e'en from morn till night,
Dwell in his presence, know his every act,
Am surely bound to keep aloof the flies
That buzz around, and compromise his peace.
Your pardon, Seneschal.

Sen. Come, come ; I grant
The royal confidence may well excuse
Some grains of self-importance in your case ;
But of your elder learn, young sir, that zeal
In the best cause can ill afford to throw
Discretion to the winds. My service here

Dates not from yesterday, nor yields to thine
 In duty or in warmth. Was I put by
 When yet uncrown'd, nor needing crown or robe
 To prime the splendour of his manly bloom,
 He stood in youth's array, and at his side,
 In maiden loveliness, the future queen ?
 Have I yet lost remembrance of the shriek
 Which pierced both ear and heart, when lo ! the prince
 Reel'd as if stricken from on high, and fell
 As a corpse falls ; while sudden, like a sound,
 Wonder and horror spread : the swooning bride
 Was borne away ; the king in tears look'd on.
 Raised from the floor, no midnight ghost more pale,
 The blighted, tott'ring bridegroom pass'd within,
 And from that hour, though since become both king
 And father, his full strength has ne'er return'd :
 Hence my anxieties.

Val. Dismiss them, pray ;
 Take on my word, for comfort, that the health
 You deem infirm, is sound ; some local pain
 May possibly at times bring to rude test

A noble mind's endurance : much, no doubt,
His people's misery, and the cruel rage
Of Norsemen, long their scourge, must deeply wound
A sovereign's heart ; yet natures such as his,
In spite of weary looks, hold bravely on,
And count on time for remedies.

Sen. 'Tis well ;
But, hush ! what means that ringing shout, that noise
Of multitudes in motion ? Haste, I beg,—
Young limbs are pliant, and from some look-out
Of vantage, see, if haply you may spy
Th' approaching rout, and warn of danger near.

[*Exit* PERS. ATTENDANT.]

The forwardness of youth may pardon take
From zeal like his, and my declining age
Must calmly don its customary badge.—
What can this tumult mean ? Alas ! the king,
Once so admired, so loved, of late has lost
Much of his people's reverence ; but for them
To throng in arms before the royal gate,
And loudly threaten, if not heard, to force

Compliance, were most strange.—I hear a tread—
 'Tis he : that hurried step and cheerless face
 Are ominous. What news? to know the worst
 Is better than to fear.

Val. Some evil tongues
 Have lash'd the people into wrath ; they feel
 The Stranger's insolence, and fain would push
 The king, too listless, as they dream, to take,
 However unprepared, the field, and risk
 Our last resources on a single throw.
 A casual leader heads them,—name unknown,—
 And soon we must expect their rude assault—
 Of words, at least,—for much I doubt their use
 Of deadlier missiles. Warn'd of the design,
 Alfred has summon'd to his instant aid
 The worthiest of his earls ; the troops, that guard
 His royal person, are already placed
 Where best they may control a lawless mob.

[*Enter MESSENGER in haste.*

Mess. Sir Seneschal ! Sir Varlet ! each and both !
 The king requires your prompt attendance : come !
 Right precious are the moments : on, I pray.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—*Courtyard. Outer gates wide open ; crowds seen beyond. Archers in array within. Ethelwolf and two others in a balcony. Deputies advance from without.*

Ethelwolf. Guards, let them pass : the king has giv'n
 command ;

We wait to hear them.—Have no fear, my friends !
 Strong as we are to keep the peace, no thought
 Of proud exclusion do we harbour ; speak !
 Here in your Sov'reign's mansion free you are
 To name your wants, your wishes, nay, if such
 Your bent, the wildest complaints.

Cedric. Great Earl ! We come
 Bold in our right, with fix'd resolve we come ;

I speak for many more by chance than choice,—
 Our sole link, sympathy : Few words are best ;
 The Norsemen grind us down : in sheer despair
 We burn to meet them ; better far to die
 Than live like dogs : the weight of taxes laid
 In steel on them would scarce be felt by us,
 Who groan beneath it now ; we miss the sword
 That flashing high, its scabbard cast aside,
 Might in a stalwart grasp soon clear the way
 Through slaughter'd foes to victory and peace.
 What say you, noble Earl ! What says the king
 To this, our expectation just and firm ?

Ethelwolf. Just, and by nature prompted is your
 claim ;

We own it frankly, and are one with you
 In sorrow and desire ; the throne itself
 Is not so high but your aspiring calls
 For vengeance and relief may reach it ; what
 You feel, be sure, is felt by him who sits
 Thereon : yet differs he from you in that
 Your safety his chief aim must ever be ;—

Reason his guide, not passion ; bide he will
 His time, yours too, nor leap with headlong rage,
 Unthinking, into waters, where the tide
 Rushes with ruthless force ; forbear a space
 We must ; meanwhile a vigilant eye
 Rests on the treach'rous foe ; a careful hand
 Provides what best may chide his insolence
 And in due season sweep him from our shores.

Cedric. Bright is that hope ; but what security
 Attends it : pirates overrun our fields,
 And famine only waits to crown their work.

Ethelwolf. Heaven's mercy and our Great Assembly's
 care
 May best assure you.

Cedric. Nathless, both at times
 Have seem'd to falter. Is there nothing more
 To stay our hunger ?—Disappointment, Earl !
 Maddens th' afflicted spirit, and keen shafts
 Wing'd by its random rage may scatter death :—

I, but a mouthpiece, have no spell wherewith
 To charm the loosen'd roar of elements
 Pregnant with storm.

Ethelwolf. We can no more ; beware
 Of outrage ! Come what may, order and law
 Must be maintain'd, e'en at the cost of blood.
 Go, as you came, unharm'd. [*They retire.*] Now close
 the gates,
 And from the Warder's tower let sign be made
 To the king's force without. [*He listens.*] No sound
 as yet
 Breaks the dread stillness ; expectation, awed
 By its own throbs, and fix'd as marble, waits,
 Leaning on silence.—Let us to the king.

SCENE IV.—*Open space before the Palace. Deputies
 slowly pacing up to the assembled crowd.*

Oedric (stepping forward). Be calm, my countrymen !
 the words I bring,
 Are such as may be weigh'd, but cannot please.

A Voice. Welcome or not, let's have 'em.

Cedric. Your desires
Frankly and fully have been bared to those
Who foremost in the royal presence stand.
They sympathize with you [*movement*]; nay, doubt it not,
In all that touches the fierce Northern hordes.
Hope is that, prudence husbanding your means,
The hour will sound, when people, thanes, and king,
At length will rise in arms, and—

[*Shouts of derision.*]

A Wag from among the Crowd. Of the Danes
Make hash, or mince meat.

[*More shouts.*]

Voices. Yes : that's it ; that's it.
We'll mince them, won't we ? Aye, and roast them
first,
So that the spit be long enough.

A Single Voice. What more
Hath our good spokesman yet to say ?—

Cedric. Your jokes,

He says, though pleasant, are misplaced ; nor would
 Your wives be much disposed to laugh, poor souls !
 Their children famishing around, and they,
 With ransack'd cupboards having nought to give.
 Saxons ! be still yourselves. This merry mood
 But ill becomes you. Mind : I courted not
 Your favour ; from the crowd ye drew me forth,
 Gave me your trust, and put into my mouth
 A voice of many tongues. I undertook
 Your cause, have done your bidding : all is told,—
 What would you now ? Accept the proffer'd hope,
 Or press your own by arms ? The hope is dim ;
 But were ye free to combat, would success
 Be sure ? Is Guthrun so unguarded ?—Lo !
 My work is done ; choose you !

*[Trumpet sounds at distance. Tramp of soldiery.
 Cries of alarm are heard. The unarmed dis-
 persing, those with arms fall into line, and
 form in front. Royal troops are seen ad-
 vancing.]*

[Enter a Yeoman in haste.]

Yeoman. Friends, countrymen,
Arm'd or unarm'd you have no choice to make ;
Already has a higher will disposed
The day's event ; resistance would be vain.

One of the armed to his neighbour. Comrade ! there's
sense in that : our civil broils,
If quench'd in blood, would only serve to speed
The Norseman's game ; 'twere shame to turn our backs,
But file we may to either side, and leave
The ground, untarnish'd, with our own consent.

Second Yeoman. Already, see ! the movement has
begun,
And we but share what all, unbidden, do.

[*The Royal Guards arrive as the others file off.*
Order to halt given.]

Officer. Soldiers ! you've shown what latent pow'r
resides
In just authority ; your front alone
Has turn'd to flight the boldest : come it will

The day, when, cap in hand, they'll give you thanks
 For teaching them to hoard their courage, till
 To better purpose they may let it loose.

SCENE V.—*A Room in the Palace.*

Enter ORDOLF and GODWYN.

Godw. Oh ! yes ; your thought is mine ; this lowering
 day
 Has ended better than I dared expect.

Ord. Yet is there room for thought. A multitude
 Whose homes in part are distant, could not well
 Be brought together by mere chance ; no doubt,
 Some active spirits gave the word, and fears,
 And sufferings, felt by thousands, work'd in aid.

Godw. True ; but they met without a leader ; few
 Had arms, and those who had, show'd little mind
 To face the royal archers.

Ord. Still I fear

The danger but adjourn'd ; when grievances
 Are real and widespread, the passions roused,
 And poor authority incompetent,
 There's force in trifles, and mere accident,
 Or sudden shock, will bring the tempest down,—
 Unshelter'd e'en the highest.

Godw. Think you then
 So lightly of the king, his name, and state,
 His treasured revenue, his lawful pow'r,
 And all that with our great Assembly's aid,
 Stands like a magic fence around his throne ?

Ord. Chaff to the whirlwind ! when a people's ire
 Boils up to frenzy, it o'erleaps the bounds
 Of staid respect, most when the sceptred hand
 Shakes as with ague.

Godw. Aye, but after all,
 Though sunk of late, we know not why, in sloth,
 He still is Alfred, and within him bides

The seed at least of that bright flame which erst
Shot from his youth, and turn'd despair to hope.

Ord. Count not on that ; such rallies, rare at best,
Shun the weak frame, in chamber habits grooved,
Want of what made him king, may shake his crown.
Nephews he has, whose sire, his elder-born,
Of the same womb, left them his natural heirs.
Growth moves with time, and such as Alfred was,
When manhood, scarce achieved, placed on his brow
The golden circlet, now their eldest is,
Or soon may be ; nor were it wild to guess
How the fierce many's will, to fury strung,
Might backward fling the crown to whence it swerved.

Godw. Nay, that were frank rebellion.

Ord. Yes ; but not
Without some show of reason ; needs but one,
A champion for the nonce, to point that way,
And change so great might prove a morning's sport.

Godw. Bold must he be, and more ; some martial skill

Must he possess, and dignity of blood
 To boot, ere he could win the people's trust,
 And with fair plea of justice wield their pow'r.
 Soldier and Earl, would you to such a call
 Attend ?

Ord. Why should I not, the State
 In peril, and the mob on mischief bent ?
 Humour'd with skill they might be sway'd from wrong.

Godw. That is ambition's gloss ; we differ ; loyal zeal,
 And warm attachment to the king that is
 Would keep me distant from the king to be.

Ord. We talk in confidence.

Godw. No doubt ; but, pray,
 Outstep not the just limits ; we are friends,
 Yet public duty has the stronger claim.

Ord. Enough ; I know your mind, and you know mine ;
 Thought without act is harmless.

Godw. Be it so ;

I must away ; farewell !

[*Exit.*

Ord. He knows my mind.

Would that he did not ! I know his ; the word
In both agrees ; not so the kind ; he knows
What by a whisper in the royal ear
Might prove my ruin, and for ever mar
The fond imaginings ambition weaves.

SCENE VI.—*King Alfred's private apartments.*

The King alone. The waves ran high, but all is calm
again,

And I have leisure from this deck of mine
To scan the heaving waters and discern
What more of danger underlies my course.
So far 'tis well ; but did I bear myself
In kingly guise, and show by word and deed
That Alfred still was worthy of his name ?

Alas ! not I : the load that has of late
 So weigh'd me down, sat heavy on my will,
 And those, who serve me, play'd their Sov'reign's part.
 Whence comes this weakness ? Youth accepts it not ;
 My years are few ; is health alone at fault ?
 Well ! that may be, for since my nuptial day
 The fit which then unmann'd me, or its cause,
 Thickens my blood, and hag-like rides the mist
 That dims my vision : am I sick at heart,
 Sick for my realm beset with cruel foes ?
 Oh ! yes, but less for them, than drain'd of strength
 By my poor driv'ling subjects, apt alike
 To suffer and to murmur, far too weak
 To loose the stranger's grasp, but ever prone
 With headstrong ignorance to wreck the State.
 Grievous to all is this, but most to me,
 Who with my own my people's grief must bear.
 Oh ! God, from whose straight path too oft I've stray'd,
 Let not thy previous gifts, now half obscured,
 Sink into utter nothingness ! Ho ! there—
 Who waits without ?

[*Enter* CHAMBERLAIN.

Cham. What may it please your grace
To order?

King. Tell my venerable guest,
The Cornish prelate, he may now approach,
Sure of my welcome. You, sir, be his guide.

Enter BISHOP NEOT.

Bishop Neot. Peace to my lord: I come with duteous
haste,
To render homage where of right.

King. Well pleased
Am I to welcome one so rich in grace
To this our royal seat. Here shall you find
That rest and comfort your advancing age
And journey's length require. Be seated, pray;
Of kindred blood are we.

Neot. To lose the sense
Of that much-valued honour would to me
Be real degradation, though the Church,
That calls me son, all earthly pride forbids,
And holds as vain all honours save its own.

King. The Church can scarce be wrong: my vows to
Her
Were paid at Rome while yet I was a child.

Neot. Such vows can ne'er be cancell'd, though the
lips
Which made them were a child's. The after life
Must wear them like a frontlet, clear to all.

King. Few lives may stand that test.

Neot. A royal life—
Forgive me, sire—is doubly bound thereto.

King. Shame, then, on mine!

Neot. So young, and yet so weak.

King. Nay, holy prelate, chide not my frail youth;
Approve my candour, rather. Treacherous health,
And gnawing pains, that leave, or night, or day,
But little space for snatches of repose,
May some indulgence claim; and deeper wounds

Than cankers of the flesh my spirit rack.
 Fierce Northmen waste our tillage ; fain would I
 Lead forth my Saxons, and the country purge
 Of their foul presence,—but it may not be :
 The men, the means, are wanting : more than this,
 My plans for time to come, my fruitful plans,
 Lie babe-like in their cradle—none to nurse
 Their latent energies, and bring the hope
 That seethes within to its allotted growth.

Neot. There spake the king that was—that ought to
 be,—

And hope is not so dead in my old heart
 But still it echoes back the cheering sound,
 And glows with kindred warmth. Oh, royal sir !
 Fling apathy to slaves, and give free scope
 To that divinity which stirs your mind.
 Act, and obedience, like a wingèd horse,
 That glories in its speed, will bear you on.

King. Yes, yes ; I know it well, but know in vain.
 A nameless fiend subdues my inner strength,

And, like a nightmare, leaves my sense at large,
But ties my tongue, and fetters every limb :
I would be other, but——

Neot. Am I awake,
Or in a dream ? 'Tis witchcraft—nothing else.
Discard the vile illusion, royal sir ;
Call God to aid, and spurn the arts of hell !

King. Witchcraft or not, a helpless victim I.

Neot. No, by the holy rood ! a suicide,
A self-destroyer,—pardon, sire, I plead
For you, your throne, your country, and your fame.

King. You go too far ; your rude reproaches wound.

Neot. If wounded, profit by the truth my sense
Of duty urges.

King. I take no offence
At what your conscience dictates, but I claim
My share of that respect whose absence mars
The wisest counsel, and inflames the sore

A gentler touch might soothe, and haply cure.

Neot. Great evils need strong remedies; I speak
As bids another king—the King of Kings.

King. Highest of high that title! were it not,
Your frank integrity and holy zeal
Would cover what might else be deem'd abuse
Of priestly freedom. Let no more be said.

Neot. King Alfred, I obey, and with me take
Unwelcome Truth, who e'en afar will raise
Her mirror to thy conscience, and present
In startling shapes the dire effects of sloth,
Though fenced around with pomp and arm'd array.
Humbly and sadly do I take my leave.

[*Exit.*

Curtain falls.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Interior of a Cave. WOLFRIDA cowering over a low fire.*

WOLFRIDA *sings, muttering.*

A sea-king was the sire,
Hence my spirit came;
Without the seeds of fire
Never yet was flame.

They dash'd me o'er with brine,
They cradled me on the wave:
Lonely and joyless here I pine;
Who will find me a grave?

How bright, how merry was life,
When the gale sang by our mast,
And the shout and clash of strife
Rode on the giddy blast!

Ha ! ha ! we've grappled the foe !
 The barks are glued like one ;
 There's triumph in every blow,
 And the work of death is done.

Up for the shore—the shore !
 There's booty for each and all ;
 Plenty to give, a little to store :
 What care we ? The skies may fall !

My voice was never of the best, and this
 Damp cave has not improved it. What of that ?
 My ears—mine only—hear it ; harm is none
 To any ; comfort, some, to me. But if
 'Twere otherwise, why grieve ? With me has life
 So smoothly run that I must dress myself
 In smiles, to please all comers ? I've outlived
 Enjoyment ; country, friends, and home
 To me are blanks ; the world and I are twain.

[Sings again.]

Where is the sea-king's home ?
 If not on the billows, where ?

'Tis blanch'd by the ocean foam,
Where rocks are rugged and bare.

Though dark the rocks, the streams are bright ;
Long and bright are the summer days ;
Winter gleams to the northern light,
Nor cares for the sunny blaze.

Never more shall foot of mine
Print the glittering Norway snows ;
Never more on Freya's shrine
Shall my weary head repose.

Hate and scorn my neighbours are ;
Tenant I of want alone ;
Night's my day—no moon, no star ;
Past is past, and gone is gone !

A footstep—hark ! how light it falls ! 'Tis thine,
Thine, Hilda ! well I know the gentle sound
Of feather-footed, blithe sixteen,—my heart,
E'en mine, can give it welcome, and awhile
Less keenly feel the wretchedness of age.
Poor orphan girl ! the Saxon blood, the creed

Her Christian mother taught her, cannot warp
 The sympathy she claims from me, in right
 Of him, her better parent, who, a Dane,
 Still lives to thought. What, child! thou couldst not
 long

Forget the wrinkled beldame. Come within;
 Thy presence cheers like morning. What's astir
 Among thy friends—thy mother's? Tell me all;
 I love to hear thee.

Hilda. By the bold sea-kings
 You first must tell me how it fares with you,
 My kind old Dame: No cramps? no dreary means?
 No touches of the Fiend?

Wolf. My wont; not more;
 The Fiend; beware of him!

Hilda. For aught I know
 His spirit is abroad; like angry bees
 The Saxons, all on wing, with busy hum
 Swarm 'round their hive; 'tis said, their tongues make
 free

With Alfred's name, and give him cause to fear
 Impending troubles hard to be appeased.

Wolf. What say you, wanton ; this is news indeed ;
 Who told you ?—

Hilda. Cedric, as we stroll'd at eve,
 An arrow's flight afield, with look so grave,
 I wonder'd, and in whispers then he spoke
 Of some great meeting, and the part he took
 In all that happen'd ; how they call'd him up
 To take the lead, and how he press'd their claims
 On some grand Earl e'en in the King's courtyard,
 And how the royal archers, marching out,
 Drove back the crowd, himself among the rest.
 He told the truth, I'm certain ; what it means
 You best may judge. Now, Granny, I must go.
 You'll keep my satchel ?—better would its freight
 Express my wishes, were it brimming o'er,—
 But means must temper gifts—Good bye, good bye.

[*Exit.*]

Wolf. She's gone ; the light goes with her, and the
chill

Of dreary loneliness curdles my blood.
Dear happy girl ! so artless, and so kind ;
— Her visits, like an angel's, come between
Me and my evil thoughts,—may never blight
Fall on that sunny cheek !—Her tale is strange :
The Saxons and their King at issue ! May the Fiend
Stretch wide their difference. If my countrymen
Have aught to fear, 'tis when those two are one.—
How now ? What shadow's that ? A man's, and arm'd !
Soul of my father ! nerve me.—Who art thou,
That dar'st by stealth intrude on this retreat,
Wolfrida's home ? Say what thou art.

Gothrun. A friend,
Though nameless here ; unknown, but from report
Well knowing whom I seek : the tongue that asks,
Might, if so tuned, command.

Wolf. Command, to me ?
The daughter of a King !

Goth. Well: Dane with Dane

Needs no enforcement ; rumours are abroad
 Of some disorder in the Saxon realm,
 Betok'ning latent fire, which it behoves
 The nearest so to watch that should the flame
 Burst forth, it would not find them unprepared.
 Be thou my oracle ; thou hast, I hear,
 A gifted spirit ; for the Northmen's sake
 Exert it now : truth pluck'd from time's clench'd hand
 Has gem-like value.—

Wolf. King ! for such thou art !

Gold tempts not me,—but from a Danish breast
 Issue the words that something from within
 Heaves to my lips. The time, though long desired,
 Has yet to ripen ere the Norseman's blade
 Shall flood this isle once more with blood of those,
 Who, like ourselves, came with the tides, and gave
 The native race no choice but death or bonds.
 Wait the doom'd hour, nor doubt but Thor himself
 Will arm his sons, and battle in their van.
 I can no more : your spies may learn the rest.

Guth. They may ; but if you see me here again,
 Be not surprised : though conquerors, we live
 Circled by numbers thirsting for revenge.
 A couch of thorns is mine. [*Exit.*

Wolf. Had I a crown,
 No fear of losing it should break my rest.

SCENE II.—*A Village Street—a fountain and basin—
 where Saxon girls are washing.*

1st Girl. This is a day. Was ever sky so blue ?
 How gay the hills !

2nd Girl. And gayer still they'll be
 As higher climbs the sun. When first I woke
 The light air fann'd my bosom and I felt
 As light myself—say what you will, no joy
 Comes up to such a summer morn as this.

1st Girl. Delightful, sure ; but is not eve as sweet,

When free from work like this, we, out of doors,
 Sit in the cool, and spinning, knitting, or,
 It may be, idling, trill some pretty song,
 While Girth or Oswald by the cottage wall
 Leans on his scythe, and looking God knows how,
 Listens to her who suits his fancy best ?

2nd Girl. Oh ! yes, that's quite another thing—
 heigho !

But now, though hard at work; no swain to help,
 We yet may talk, or even sing awhile.

1st Girl. Some *plaintive* ditty then. Shall I begin ?

2nd Girl. Oh ! do :—

1st Girl sings.

They met—in love they met
 Beneath the green hill-side ;
 Her eyes were dark as jet,
 But tears had dimm'd their pride.

The Raven's wing alone
 Could match her glossy hair ;
 You'd say the rose had blown
 To light a cheek so fair.

And he was comely too
 In youth's sweet hour of prime ;
 His form to manhood true
 Had yet to gain from time.

In each the other found
 Whate'er the world could give,
 No wish in all its round
 But heart with heart to live.

I wonder what comes next : dear ! dear ! what's next ?
 How tiresome ! oh !—I have—I have it now.

Alack ! it may not be :
 They only meet to part ;
 In lands far off will he
 Retain a faithful heart ?

In other lands she deem'd
 Young faces might be fair ;
 Thus jealous fancy dream'd,
 And woke to blank despair.

So young,—'twas hard to die :
 One last embrace,—'tis o'er ;
 The lover turns to fly,
 She clasps the grassy floor.

A shriek ! a shriek of pain !
 My Edgar !—death is rest ;
 He calls her back in vain,
 And bleeds upon her breast.

Weeping, you foolish girl ?—'Tis but a tale :
 Come, come,—those tears are selfish ; fear not, lass !
 Oswald will never kill himself for love.

2nd Girl. Why should he *not* ?—

1st Girl. Why *should* he ? If his friend
 Were Hilda,—then indeed—

2nd Girl. For Hilda why
More than for you or me ?

1st Girl. Oh ! she's so fair,
So kind, so bright ; were I a man, methinks
Her loss would make me fall in love with death.

2nd Girl. Would Cedric think so ?

1st Girl. What of him ?

2nd Girl. They say
He thralls her heart,—why not ?—La ! here he comes.

Enter CEDRIC.

Cedric. Good day, my winsome lasses !—talk and
work
Go bravely on with you,—an ill-match'd pair,
But at your bidding twins : Speed well your task ;
Something, no doubt, of what's afoot you'll hear.
Stout hearts are wanted, aye, and steady hands,
Your brothers, cousins, better still, your friends

May take a hint from you ; pray, let them see
 You have at heart your country's weal, and keep
 Your troth for those who show they prize it too.

All. Won't we, good Cedric ?—You may count on us !

SCENE III.—*A Room in Alfred's Palace.*

The QUEEN and Royal Children appear.

Queen (apart). What can it be ? What means this sad
 reverse ?

Alfred, my king, my husband—dearer yet—
 My children's father,—loved, admired by all,
 So full of brightest, greatest qualities—
 Made for a crown, with sword, and skilful peer *her*
 To boot,—and still so young, so good,—for him to be
 His people's scorn, a burden to himself,
 Surpasses credence !—Does some ill unheled
 Prey on his frame ?—But then a mind so strong
 Would never yield to pain. Poisons there are

(Q. al'd)

Which linger in the veins, and undermine
 With slow, but sure effect the vital pow'rs.
 But where the hand to deal them ? Witchcraft thrives
 Amongst our Danish neighbours—have they found
 Some charm to quell the aspiring heart of him
 They most have dreaded since their fatal rout
 At Ashdune ?—All is possible,—I'm lost
 In wild conjectures. Oh ! that ignorance
 Gross as in childhood would envelop facts !
 Conjecture, that gives shape to air, for one
 Who knows too little and too much, is pain.

Enter KING ALFRED.

Alf. What have we here ? Elswitha ? and in tears ?
 Queen of my heart ! why this ? the children too
 Have not their wonted cheer ; they seem to feel,
 Not knowing why, that all is out of tune.

Queen. Nay, wonder not, my Alfred ! discord reigns ;
 You and yourself are two,—the realm is torn
 Betwixt allegiance and sore discontent.
 Myself am half distracted to behold

The gloom fast settling down upon that brow
 To which we look for sunny hopefulness ;
 The children but reflect their mother's woe.

Alf. What need I more to drain the very lees
 Distress of mind and body scarce hath left
 Beneath that crown I fain would gem with deeds,
 But sick in striving ; you must share my load. ? /
 Be Heav'n our help. 'Tis strength, not love, that fails.

Queen. You sign to be alone : to leave you thus
 Is hard indeed ; but to obey shows best
 The sacred tie that binds my heart to yours.

[Exit with the children.]

Alf. What ! art thou come, dread crisis ! whose bare
 thought
 Makes choice a mountain, though in truth no room
 For choice remains. I must at once resume
 My early course, or pay the forfeit down.
 Wife, children, subjects, millions yet unborn
 Have claims that cry aloud, and I, to shrink
 From heeding them, must peril fame and soul.

Well ;—but the means ? My people are estranged ;
 The Danes are strong, and e'en in martial skill
 Not wanting : would I might affirm as much
 Of my own Saxons ! They, to mend, must feel
 How vain their self-reliance, and submit
 To discipline's stern yoke. Before me yawns
 A gulf :—how bridge it o'er ?—hard, hard the task.
 Eyes of the mind, be keen !—alas ! thick rolls
 The mist.—Oh ! for some rift—one little rift !
 Recoil, I may not !—now, methinks, a gleam,
 Tho' faint, appears, severing the vapours—Ho !
 It widens—brightens—Yes : I all but clutch
 A form, not bodied yet, but out-lined—So !
 Mysterious absence, dearth of leadership.
 Example, first my own, deep-striking change,
 And secret preparation—all in turn
 Must rouse their sluggish apprehensions :—Then,
 The road, they've stray'd from, may again receive
 Their slippery feet, and lead where victory
 May crown with peaceful arts the feats of war.
 But none must know my whereabouts ; alone,
 With wallet at my side, and staff in hand,

At night must I go forth,—the stars o'erhead,
 Strange lands around me : will my strength hold out ?
 Will God vouchsafe to guide ?—Toil ! peril ! wants !
 With Him I brave you all ; my heart's resolved.
 But stay ; what if I bade the Witten meet ;—
 Their name would check the burst of wild surprise,
 And mask my scheme. Enough : the die is cast.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.—*Room in a Government Office.*

CLERKS *at their several desks.*

Chief Clerk. First read the Royal Ordinance, and then
 Make out the writs ; take heed the King's commands
 Be strictly kept ; in matters of the State
 Letter and form must be right orthodox,
 Mind ! no mistakes : The Witten are to meet
 In customary form ; let all, whose names,
 Clergy or Lay, appear upon the rolls,
 Be summon'd ; time and place to be fill'd in
 Hereafter.

Young Clerk. May it please you, Sir, to say
 What motives for an extra meeting of
 The great Assembly you think fit to name.

Chief Clerk. Motives ! why, none : enough the royal
 will ;
 Go to : what dream you of ?—

Another Clerk. Please, honour'd Sir,
 Are Bishops to be call'd by their own names,
 Or as their Sees are call'd ?

Chief Clerk. If you by writ
 Were summon'd, would the name therein
 Be yours or goose ? Ask of your colleagues there ;
 I marvel at such questions.

Another Clerk. Sir ! we find
 The forms we copy from a little hard
 Either to read or spell.

Chief Clerk. Have you not shame

To boggle in such guise ? I tell you what,
 The time will come when ignorance so gross
 Will clear no threshold, when a test of worth,
 Styled *Competition*, will set all to rights,
 And make your spelling perfect.

Young Clerk. Sir ! we own
 The faults you notice, and beforehand hail
 That better time, when purged of all mistakes
 Our mother tongue shall pass from hand to eye,
 From tongue to ear, unmaim'd, save now and then.

Chief Clerk. How now ? what means this ill-mask'd
 irony ?

Young man ! remember you're on duty here.
 Attentive silence best the present task
 Befits ; I leave you now, and look to find
 The writs on my return complete. [*Exit.*

Young Clerk. He's off !
 Was ever such a prig !—too old to mend ! !

X/ SCENE V.—*Hall in the Palace. King Alfred's VALET*
pacing anxiously in the Hall.

X/ Val. Not in his bed ! not in his room ! no trace
 Or sign of his familiar habits—none !—
 What must we think ? I tremble at my own
 Imaginations !

Enter SENESCHAL.

Sen. What hath moved you so ?
 You look distraught,—I scarcely dare to ask.

Val. Would that my tongue were dumb ! Alas !
 I fear
 Some evil to our royal master,—what,
 Exceeds my reach. His chamber gives no sign
 Of his night's rest.

Sen. Perhaps you bear in mind
 When last you saw him.

Val. Doubt not. Yester e'en,
 About the hour when I was wont to take

His pleasure for the night, he bade me go,
 And turn'd within, as if to be alone
 For some high call of State had been his aim.

Sen. My wonder equals yours ; but let not fear
 Prevail o'er prudence. When a king is miss'd,
 Alarm spreads wide and fast ; all minds are stirr'd,
 And thoughts long held in check break rashly out.
 In such nice matters secrecy may lead
 To danger ; and for us the safer course,
 In my poor judgment, is to apprise the Earl,
 Whose high authority o'ertops us all.

Pers. Att. Good, good ; I haste to do it. [*Exit.*

Sen. Speed you well !

Enter the PALACE PORTER.

Port. I come to tell you, sir, that ere I closed
 Last night the palace gates, whose heavy bolts
 Had been by chance unfasten'd just before,
 A stranger pass'd without. I saw him pass,

But not in time for question ; my first thought
Was to pursue, but ere I well could start,
In the blind gathering loom the man was lost.

Sen. How look'd he ? tall or short ? slender or stout ?
What was his gait ?

Port. I saw not clearly, but
He seem'd of comely form, proportion'd well ;
His step was that of youth not quite at ease.

Sen. Arm'd, and with what ?

Port. A staff was all I kenn'd.

Sen. You need not wait.—This also to the Earl.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE VI.—*A Council Chamber. ETHELWOLF, ORDOLF,
GODWYN, and others. The QUEEN in mourning.*

Eth. So burden'd is my heart, in grief so steep'd,
So utterly o'ercome, I scarce know how

To bring the sad event we all deplore
 In worthy terms before you. Death, we know,
 By hard experience, oft deprives a realm
 Of some loved ruler, whose benignant sway
 Maintain'd in pcease its weal and rightful pow'r.
 Submission then to God's high will relieves
 In some degree the loss. Our strange mischance
 Forbids that solace ; fearful mystery,
 Dark as disastrous, hangs around the cause
 Of our bereavement ; all we know for sure
 Is this,—the royal seat is vacant ; he
 Our king, our king by choice, may not have pass'd
 Beyond life's earthly bound : so dear a hope
 We cherish still, but hope oft proves a cheat.
 To you, most wise and trusty Counsellors,
 We look for guidance.

(To EARL ORDOLF.) Ever, noble Earl,
 Your words have weight : how say you ?

Ord. Tears, not words,
 Must first have passage : what can orphans do
 But weep and pray ? Death shuts the door on hope !

We may indeed still hope, but hope, that breeds
 Th' uncertain, shakes decision, and prolongs
 That moral weakness which invites the worst.
 Allegiance,—to the dead perchance,—and care,—
 Yes, anxious care, for the imperill'd State,—
 Hold me in dim suspense: perhaps, 'twere good
 To make our beds on chance, and dream it out,—
 But then to what might we awake? Our laws
 Of early usage make the crown in part
 Elective; our lost Alfred took it not
 By blood-succession, but on plea, confirm'd,
 Of worth and years; so might it be again;
 What more? our Great Assembly has to meet,—
 Tho' not quite yet; meanwhile, the heavens may clear.
 Time travels quick, and youth becomes mature
 • With speed that startles. Such things merit thought.

Godwyn. I fain would keep from speech, but when I
 hear

Such intimations as the noble Earl
 Has with much skill put forth, my duty calls
 For utterance, public zeal and personal

Affection joining to enforce the call.
 True, and most sad it is, that from our sight
 The King has vanish'd ; but to doom him dead
 On that sole ground, and so dispose the crown,
 That he, our liege, returning should be held
 A subject to some subject deck'd therewith,
 Is simply monstrous : what faint gleams we have
 Whereby to shape surmises, hope-ward tend :—
 My strong persuasion is that he still lives,—
 Much haste may prove a curse ; there's room enough
 Here in the council for aspiring minds,
 And those, on whom King Alfred most relied,
 May best uphold his throne and guard his fame.

Queen. Judge of my grief and wonder by your own,
 But never, never can ye sound the depth
 Of my bereavement ! brief, I trust, it is,
 And fraught with profit ; all that can be done
 To soothe and end it, you, I know, will do.
 May Heav'n direct your efforts ; my poor thanks,
 Whate'er the issue, will attend you all.
 But ask not my assent on mere surmise

To deem him dead in whom my life is wrapt,
Or void his throne, while life's last spark yet glows.

Earl. So, gracious lady.

[*Exit* QUEEN.

Noble colleagues, all !

Your doubts, might I interpret them, would seem
To wear the colour of mine own ; to grief
So deep unbounded reverence is due.
We must be hopefull still and patient ; time
Is no light friend : here stands our task awhile,
Save what untiring search and diligence,
For the State's weal may at our hands require.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VII.—*A Room in Earl Ordolf's House.*

Ordolf (alone). Now is my time : Alfred's mysterious
fate,

The Witanagemot's delay, the dread
Of Danish inroads, and the dread as strong
Of Saxon rebels, with a government

By council, over which our doleful Queen
 Exerts a wayward sway, concurring seem
 To urge me on, yes, onward to the goal.
 The royal nephews—either—may without
 Compunction fill their Uncle's vacant seat.
 He king'd himself by taking theirs : who reads
 Foul treason in such act ? The popular mind
 Leans to the crown's descent in line of blood.
 Who makes a king, may rule him,—why not I ?
 There may be quicksands,—but a glittering gem
 Sparkles to sight above ; am I too weak
 To reach it ? Ha ! who knocks ?—'tis he, no doubt,
 My other self, my foster-brother—mine
 By force of common nurture,—come, come in :
 Well, are you ready ?

F. B. Yes : to do your will
 Quite, quite ready, ever.

Ord. What that will is now
 You know as I do ; need of more is none :
 Only be secret—to the Prince alone

Address your word—observe his bearing well ;
 Take measure more from that than from his tongue.
 Note his surroundings too, and bear in thought
 That arm'd dependents, not a few, may chance
 To be required ;—no writing, mind ! yourself
 Returning will advise me ;—trust and love
 Go with you—quick !

F. B. So quick that my rebound
 Shall send me back ere you believe me gone. [*Exit.*

☐ *Ord.* A right good fellow : Fortune ! be my speed !
 Alfred ! alive or dead, I fear thee not.
 [*Exit.*

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*A Forest with Water and a small Boat.*

Enter ALFRED.

Alf. At length my toilsome journey is achieved—
 Toil, peril, care,—but here, thank God ! at last,
 Weary, yet not o'ercome, something still left
 In my lean wallet, and this garb of mine
 Less worn by stress of travel than I fear'd.
 The Danes are not asleep or few—but, thanks
 Again to Heav'n ! they took me as I seem'd,
 And set me down for some poor journeyman
 Not worth their plund'ring. Had they guess'd what
 prize
 So near them stray'd, my plans, my cherish'd plans
 Had come to nothing like a sound or dream :
 Ere long, I trust, they'll rue their laziness.
 Pride, pride, be still ! what right have I to hope ?
 No treasury—no troops—no friends—what else ?

A houseless wand'rer—soon to beg my bread
 Am I—no, no : I'm more than that, a man
 Arm'd to the teeth and rich,—yes, arm'd with faith,
 And rich in resolutions death may quench,
 But suffering cannot shake. Hail ! stern retreat !
 Home of my choice, tho' rough. Oh ! be thou true ;
 Hide me in thy dense umbrage, fence me round
 With thy broad belt of waters, hard to pass,
 That solitude, grave nurse of glorious aims,
 May feed my thoughts and rear them into deeds !

Boatman. What, ho ! you fellow ! do you think to step
 Dry-shod across the swamp ? My boat alone
 Can take you over ; so, no more ado ;
 Come, be alive !—your baggage, it would seem,
 Is light enough—there now—your hand—the craft
 Is not so crazy—but sit still—'tis best.

Alfred. And must my tongue be quiet ?

Boatman. That's for you
 To settle ; few in trying have much luck.



Alf. Tell me, I pray you, if yon forest girds
A habitable space, who tenants it ?

Boatman. Who but a swineherd and his wife—that's
all.

Alf. Good people, eh ?

Boatman. Yes ; good enough, I trow,
For such a spot,—She somewhat of a scold.
But what of that ? there's life—much wanted here—
In a quick temper.

Alf. Yonder—'mongst the trees
Runs there no *wild* life ?

Boatman. Save deer and goats, none,
Nor yet of them too many.—Here we are ;
The ground is firm, no fear but you may land.

Alf. Good, good, my friend ! your boat and you
deserve

My hearty thanks ; take this and speed you well.

[*Exeunt boat and Boatman.*]

He's gone : and now my fate,—nor mine alone,—

Depends on one poor swineherd and his wife.

Oh ! lesson for a king—their cottage—where ?

It must be near, and judging from the smoke,

Its place is in the open. Some few roods

Of steady pacing, and my feet are there. [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*Before a Cottage door.* GITHRA *spinning.*

Enter ALFRED.

Alf. Good day ! fair dame—I deem it lucky dole
To find you here : unbidden to intrude
Within your door, exceeds my daring :—yet—
Yet such my need, it forces me to beg
Your kindly aid ; my slender stock of food
Is well-nigh spent, and far am I from home.

Githra. You should not have left home so ill-supplied ;
Think you I spin for beggars ? Get you gone.

Alf. Nay, if I beg, I do not mean to live
 A drone ; I tender service for your alms.
 Be sure, in all whereby my hands or feet
 Can do your bidding, they shall be as yours.

Githra. What ! would you have me put my substance,
 knave,
 In charge of such as you ?

Alf. 'Tis true, no proof
 Of honesty, or worth of any kind
 Have I to show ; but you have watchful eyes,
 And fraud, though sly, would have small chance with
 them.

Githra. Oh ! yes : you think me vain, and shape your
 words
 To fool me ; it won't do ; you only stir
 My anger.

Alf. Not for worlds ! I'd rather starve :
 And such the lot before me.

Githra. Not so fast :
 Danulf, my husband, shortly will come in,
 And he may fancy you.

Alf. Then will I wait ;
 And lay me on that sunny bank to sleep.

Githra. What better ? sleep is food at little cost.

Alf. Many such meals would make the stoutest thin.
 [*He lies down.*]

Enter DANULF.

Dan. What stranger sleeps out there ?

Githra. A Saxon youth,
 Whose urgent need is service, here would stay
 For board and lodging, if so be you like it.

Dan. A Saxon, say you, and a youth ?

Githra. He's young,
 That's clear, well up in manhood though ! his brow

A bed of early cares, with voice and mien
 Above his seeming,—if below his word
 In serving, I can chide, you can dismiss.—

Dan. For chiding few like you, Dame ; that's a fact :
 Why not retain him ? he's in need, you say,
 And doubtless may be useful,—kindness thus
 And profit meet. I'll call him up at once.
 He'll fare but roughly though in this rude isle.
 But peace and safety make amends, and time
 May bring more comfort from his distant home.
 Saxon means Christian—that alone makes one
 Of hearts by nature sunder'd, and the hate
 Of Northmen rivets fast what faith has join'd.

SCENE III.—*A Chamber in Guthrun's Palace.*

KING GUTHRUN *seated*—HELMSTES, SIGARD, HENGIST,
and other Chief Officers—Danish—on each side.

King Guthrun. Danes ! noble Danes ! who in the
 bloody field

To conquest oft have led our sea-borne hosts,
 And firmly in this much-contested land
 Have fix'd our raven Standard,—Odin's own—
 I bid you welcome here, and greet with news
 Of cheering import your expectant ears.
 Alfred, the Saxon King, has left unfill'd
 His royal seat, absconding none know why,
 Or whither gone; the secret, sudden shock
 Has shaken to the core his orphan'd realm,
 Which, like a tempest-stricken vessel, reels
 In blind confusion,—none to take the helm,
 Or taking, to direct it. This, methinks,
 May well give action to the hope, we all
 At heart so warmly cherish; when and how
 Remains for thought; to you, most warlike Yarls!
 I look for counsel: freely speak your minds.

Helmstes. The hope we cherish is in truth a flame
 That long consumes us. We are here in right
 Of our good swords, and naught, I ween, but fear
 Keeps down the smitten, who for us and ours
 Reluctant plough their lands, and sow that seed,

Which in the golden time of harvest falls
 To other hands than theirs. Hate us they must,
 And the fierce thirst of vengeance only waits
 For time and fair occasion : be advised !
 Prevent them : that's our task ; the season, now.
 On them at once ! unsparing as the storm
 That buries in the deep our struggling barks !
 Let their rich farms be vacant as their throne,
 For us to hold, and make our children's too.

Sigard. The stirring words, we have just heard, are
 those

Of a true-hearted Dane, and you, my King,
 Will, if I err not, deign to think them such.
 But valour, to secure its purpose, needs
 To slake its hot conclusions ; zeal and haste,
 If temper'd not by prudence, oft outstrip
 The intended pace and leave behind a force,
 Which, starting from its ambush, takes in rear
 The would-be victors, and in flight or death,
 Closes their rash attempt.—Confused, dismay'd
 By loss of their chief stay, th' instinctive sense

Of weakness, and its kin, mistrust, will damp
 Their energies, and so unbrace their nerves,
 That left in sanguine doubt of our designs,
 Less apt will they become from day to day
 To stand our brunt, or sell their freedom dear.
 The sight of instant danger would dispel
 Their first alarm and link them all as one.
 Awhile dissemble ; throw the fleece around
 Your wolfish thoughts ; prepare your hostile means,
 And full success will crown the measured game.

Hengist. A Dane, and temporize ! forbid it, Thor !
 What are these Saxons, that our fears should stand
 Between their doom and us : my word is, strike,—
 Strike, while amazement dulls the little cheer
 Our arms have left them. Let their blood in streams
 Fatten the land they only hold for us,—
 Our bondsmen they must be ;—if they resist,
 Let ruthless tortures rack them e'en to death.
 Such are my counsels, King ! and if I stand
 Alone, unheeded, such will they remain.
 Yes. Danes are Danes, and I speak out for all.

Enter an ATTENDANT in breathless haste.

Att. My Lord the King! a woman, strange in dress—
Of lofty stature, of defiant mien,—
A naked dagger in her hand, uncheck'd,
Strides hither—close upon my heels—beware!

Enter WOLFRIDA.

Wolf. Avaunt! unmanner'd churls! I come not here
To threaten or disturb; this weapon, See!
I fling aside; the daughter of a King
I know not fear, but something do I know
It much concerns you all betimes to learn.
King Alfred lives, but treason is at work
To place another's head within the crown.
As yet the scheme is green, and months may pass
Before the civil strife, its sure effect,
Shall part the Saxon into hostile camps.
I know your love of battle and of spoil,
Nor deem it strange that men so flesh'd in war
Should burn to sound the trumpet, point the spear,
And rush to combat, now that Alfred's lost.
But that small voice, which from my bosom's depth

Creeps with a spell-like pow'r and must be heard,
 Has urged me hither : take my warning, King !
 Take it, ye Earls ! nor let your bird of Fate
 Display its ruffling plumes till discord make
 The Saxon twain, and their mean Church, uprear'd
 On Pagan ruins, share the Nation's doom.
 My task is finish'd—Hark ! I must be gone. [*Exit.*

Guthrun. By Woden a weird Monitress !—her words,
 Truthful or not, sink deep, and harmonize
 E'en to a marvel, though on other grounds,
 With those sage counsels, which preceded hers.
 Look to your serfs, brave Earls ! your arms, your stores,
 Prompt without noise, and in the destined hour
 We'll show that swords may rest, yet keep their edge.
 [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*Inside of Danulf's Cottage.*

DANULF, GITHRA, and ALFRED.

Dan. Sharp tidings, Dame ! yon ferryman relates
That our good King is nowhere, that alarm
And dull amazement, as when comets blaze,
Possess the boldest ; some of civil war
And blows and bloodshed talk, some think the Danes
Will scent our weakness, and burst forth in swarms.

Githra. Dear, dear, how sad ! to think the loss of one
Should make so many wretched. *Alfred,* sure,
If not the victim of some plot or chance,
Will reappear ere long ; if pique or whim
Possess him, may his ears be soundly rubb'd !

Dan. *Alfred,* I've heard, is not the man to shrink
From danger, or to turn his back on those
He swore to shield. Day follows close on night,
And time is wearing fast ; my bristly charge
Seem by their fretful grunts to chide my stay.

[*Exit.*]

Githra. Danulf, away, I must bestir myself.
 Floors to be swept and strewn with rushes, shelves
 To take their garniture of plates, pitchers
 To fill, water set on to boil, and then
 Something to hit my good man's appetite,
 Which all my pains can hardly please at times.
 They say I have a temper,—God be praised,
 I have; much comfort lies in scolding! I
 Should die without it. Where's our varlet now?

Alf. (advancing). Here for your service.

Githra. Mark! while I'm about,
 Do you keep watch. No stray, no slip, no nod;
 With me neglect, or drowsiness, is crime.
 No sulking; more anon.

Alf. (apart). What a frank shrew!
 Like all her sisterhood, she would exalt
 The devil in her tongue. It must be borne.
 On! time, and free me. Here she comes again.

Githra. Now, mooncalf, are you napping?

Alf. No : good dame !

Awake and ready.

Githra. So : you see that cake ?

With my own hands I made it ; have a care,
Look sharply to the baking ; turn it, first
On one, then on the other side ; the fire,
With balanced heat, browns both ; I must awhile
Go forth ; I look to find it done, well done,
When I get back.

[*Exit.*

Alf. A pretty job for one

Who owns a crown, and could in time and place
Put that old gossip on the grate instead
Of her fine cake ! but no ; her will is mine :
I said it, and swerve not. Oh ! could the hearts
Of my rude folk be kneaded into shape
Like that, my oaten charge, and made to feel
The patriot's noble fire, this menial task
Would be my pride, and cheerly would I sink

Yet lower to achieve my soul's desire.
 Now for another turn,—the sixth—much care
 To little purpose—'tis a stubborn cake,
 And fifty turns will never make it brown.
 Long standing wearies me ; I'll sit awhile ;
 An easy posture may refresh me.—There.—

[He soon falls asleep and the cake is burnt to a cinder. GITHRA, returning, flies into a passion, and rouses him with a box on the ear. ALFRED amazed, and angry, might have forgotten himself, if DANULF, also returning, had not appeased him by paying his termagant wife the same compliment she had bestowed on the disguised King.]

Githra. Unmanly beast ! what ! strike a woman !
 shame !

Dan. A scold, no woman.

Githra. To your grunTERS go !
 And feed with them on garbage. Cake of mine
 You'll never taste again.

Dan. Well, let that be :

But still the household duties must be done ;
My wants are few. (*To ALFRED*) Forgive her, gentle
youth,

She'll soon come to ; her temper flits about
Just like our weather, heat and cold by fits,
In one same day extremes of every kind.

Alf. I'm bound to both of you, and grieve to be
A cause of difference even for an hour.
'Twere well her hand were lighter, though.

SCENE V.—*Wolfrida's Cave.* WOLFEIDA and HILDA.

Hilda. What looks
Are these, Wolfrida ? looks, that darkly clothe
Your wonted visage and make sadness wear
A deeper gloom. What done, or to be done,
Congeals your blood, and gives your searching eyes
A glare that tells of troublous thoughts beneath :
I like them not ; they fright me, and I look
Trembling, scarce breathing, around for eyes less weird. 2

Wolf. Youth and its gay companions, hope and joy,
 Give you such airy spirits, that my gloom
 Seems doubled to your sight; you feel for me,
 I know; that soothes, but if it soothe at cost
 Of your kind bosom's cheer, I take it not.
 Come near; there's much on foot, much at this hour
 To craze or muddle harder brains than mine.
 Storms all around are gath'ring—at a word
 Untied they might rush forth, and wrap the land
 In fearful desolation—Saxons, Danes—
 So sunder'd, yet so mingled—may with force
 Of thunder-clouds, impell'd by raving winds,
 In furious conflict clash—if any, who
 Of either side would stagger out alive
 From the vast flood of battle, time may show,
 I cannot:—you are pale, sweet Hilda! these
 Forebodings might indeed well blanch a cheek
 Ruddier than yours.

Hilda. Oh! it's too cruel, too
 Appalling, e'en to figure as a chance;—
 But real, here, about us, at our doors,

Flashing on all our senses, terrible !
 Where thrust our wilder'd heads ? how shelter those
 In peril dearest,—by their bravery mark'd
 For sacrifice, the bravest, first ?—where, where
 Will my own Cedric be, if not in front
 Of danger, in the combat's very throat
 Provoking death ? I shudder at the thought.
 You, born of Danes, Wolfrida, and by Danes
 Nurtured from birth, would, if the day were theirs,
 Partake their triumph, and rejoice with them.
 On me, whate'er the issue, grief must light.

Enter KING GUTHRUN.

Guth. What, ho ! Wolfrida ! art thou to be seen ?

Wolf. Ever to serve thee, king !

Guth. But I descry
 Another ; I had fancied thee alone ;
 Intrude I would not.

Wolf. 'Tis a Saxon lass,

Whose Danish father held in my regard
 A place death could not cancel : she consoles
 My grief-worn bosom, bears with all my plaints,
 And proves by many nameless little acts
 Of kind attention how she feels my woes.
 Such is not oft the case when sixteen years
 Expand the soul to every dream of joy,
 And this bright world, with all its sparkling charms,
 Seems a new Eden for another Eve.
 Mock not these tears ; the sternest melt at times.
 Hilda ! come forward, child !—be not so coy ;
 There's nothing here to chafe you.

Hilda. Where you are
 My courage fails not ; but I think it time
 My feet should be alert to bear me home.
 Much have you told me, much to make me think.
 I'll come again, be sure, and, please you, soon. [*Exit.*

Wolf. She dared not look at you, Sir King, but made
 Her passing court'sy with no common grace,—
 At least I hope you thought so.

Guth. Otherwise

To think, would argue blindness. Heavens ! if the Dane
 With Saxon mingling could be ever sure
 To form such perfect loveliness, 'twere sin,
 'Twere blackest crime to waste each other's blood
 In deadly strnggles ; both should drop their arms
 And live, one nation, in the bonds of love.

Wolf. Well, your example would go far. But, Sir,
 You came for other purpose : is there aught
 My zeal may further ?

Guth. On yourself hangs *that*.

Alfred is still a name—if more or less,
 I know not, though to know concerns me much.
 You with th' Unseen have those strong sympathies
 Which can unmask the Hidden, and forenote
 What time may blaze hereafter : what thou canst,
 Say now.

Wolf. King Guthrun ! Alfred lives ; nor doubt
 He meditates thy ruin. Once I said,

And now I say, *Prepare !* Dumb stillness oft
Heralds the thunderbolt.

Guth. Granted : but how,
And when, and where are points of consequence
Wrapt in close darkness.—Shouts ! what mean they ?
more !
And screams as of a woman. King, or not,
My brand shall solve the riddle.— [*Draws and exit.*]

Wolf. Man, at least.

SCENE VI.—*Forest glade not far from the Cave.*

*A riotous company of young Danes. HILDA with hair
and dress in disorder dragg'd along by two of them.*

Hilda (struggling). Unhand me, villains ! whither
would ye drag
A poor defenceless girl ?—off—off, I say.

No farther—here—here kill me in the light,
The blessed light of heav'n. [GUTHRUN *rushes in.*

[*He strikes down one of the party dragging HILDA
along ; the other lets go his hold. She falls.
GUTHRUN raises and recognizes her.*]

Guthrun. What, Hilda! miscreants! how could ye
dare

To lay your all-contaminating hands
On one so pure, so perfect in her charms,
To which less brutal natures would have knelt
As to a goddess?—Thou, who wearest looks
Something more sober than thy fellows, say,
Whence came this infamy? . Who—what provoked
So base an outrage? on thy head, reply.

Young Dane. I, my Lord King! saw nothing of its
birth;

What since I've gather'd is that some of these
Young bloods, your subjects, like myself, were out
On holiday, and by a chance, when high
In mirth, and possibly a drop too deep

In mead, fell in with yonder lass, of whom
 They only knew she lived with Saxon friends,
 And proud of beauty more than common, gave
 Her Danish neighbours such o'erweening looks,
 They held her in dislike ; and then they said
 She had for friend a Saxon yeoman,—yes,
 Cedric by name, who never pass'd a Dane
 Without some mark of hatred or contempt.
 Meeting by chance, they thought it sport to jeer
 The village queen, and so one thing brought on
 Another, till rude play and heated blood
 Fermented into worse, and who can tell
 With what foul issue, had not you, my king,
 Check'd the wild rout and freed their maiden thrall.
 Her friend himself approaches.

Enter CEDRIC armed.

Ced. Brood of hell !

Dastards and ravishers ! give up your prey—
 Release her on the instant—stand aside—
 Or by the sacred name of Him I serve
 This hour shall be your last.

Hilda. Oh ! Cedric, spare,
Spare the young dotards ; they're beneath your rage.
Their king has saved me : I'm unhurt, unharm'd ;
To him your thanks.

Ced. The first to Heaven are due ;
Now, King, to thee with grateful heart I turn.

Guth. Nay, spare your thanks ; I but obey'd my
heart.
Take home your lovely kinswoman and learn
For their king's sake to hate his subjects less.
Her late tormentors shall be look'd to,—Go !

Hilda. Not till we both once more have eased our
hearts
By graving deeply there our new-made debt.

Guth. There is no debt where nothing more is
done
Than what the doer glories to have done.
His pleasure pays him.

Hilda. Yet must we confess
A debt no payment ~~ever~~ can acquit.

Guth. I rest content to be your creditor.

Cedric. We doubt not your discretion, and take
leave
In full reliance on your manly faith.

[*Exit with HILDA.*

wf. / Guth. What's here that stronger than myself creeps
in

Upon my nobler thoughts, where chamber'd lies
An image fairer than the myths of old
Have ever painted on the eye of faith.
Young, gentle, beautiful, intelligent,
As lilies pure with blushes of the rose,
And modest as the violet, whose leaves
Keep the bold sun at distance, who would not
For such divinity in mortal shape
All other prizes of the world forego,
And deem it highest privilege to share

With one so faultless e'en the crown itself?
 To win, how precious! then to lose the prize
 Is equal in reverse. Poor Cedric! Well,
 A Saxon churl must e'en accept his lot.

SCENE VII.—*A room in Earl Ordolf's house.*

X / *The EARL and his FOSTER BROTHER.*

Ord. The time,—the work,—both marvels; evermore
 I rest your debtor: What? he likes our plan,
 But would not hurry?—

Fos. Bro. Yes; the golden round
 Your message pointed to, before his eyes
 Hangs temptingly; he longs to clutch the prize,
 But somewhat cold at heart, he fears the risk,
 And rather would by slow approaches steal
 Securely on his prey, than by a bound,
 Which might fall short or over, seize and hold.

Ord. Such are all *vulgar* natures ; they would sit
 With open mouth and eyes turn'd back beneath
 Some pendent fruit, content to wait its fall,
 Nor stretch a hand to nip the brittle stalk.
 Would 'twere not so, but worse it were to force
 The sluggish springs, and snap them, it might be,
 By too severe a strain.

Fos. Bro. He'll rouse his friends
 Meanwhile, collect the means of action, gird
 In short, his loins, and call, when time matures,
 For your sage counsels and concurrent aid.

Ord. Friends he must have, or few, or many,
 friends
 Of much or little weight ; unlikely, none.
 His birth and blood-relation to the crown
 Secure him *that* ; but if his wishes rise
 To the full height of fortune's proffer'd grace,
 He must be master, not a slave to wait
 On time and tide, and shifting circumstance,
 But maker of the steps by which to mount

Whither ambition points. He has, no doubt,
 To swing from rope to rope across a gulf,
 Where but one miss would hurl him headlong down;
 But still the daring breathe a keener life,
 And, missing, fall into the lap of fame.

× / *Fos. Bro.* Trick'd in your colours, failure has a
 charm

That makes success quite pale; but prejudice
 Clings to the latter, and most people, less
 Enthusiastic than yourself, prefer
 A seat, though waited for, in conquest's car.

Ord. Well, let them wait; I, too, it seems must
 wait;

My arms may lift another, but without
 Some buoyant plumage I should strive in vain
 To lift myself:—A name, the people's whim,
 Necessity at times, may waft on high,
 But like a soap-made bubble, or at most
 A meteor, just to glitter, and go out.

Fos. Bro. The Prince, I think, has ever in his view
 The chance of Alfred's reappearance ; dead
 If once he knew him, fear would cease to ride
 His stumbling resolution ; as it is,
 The phantom awes him, and his gain-time wish
 To sound our great Assembly takes the lead
 In his mind's council. Of his intimates,
 If one there be whose heart with stronger beat
 Responds to the occasion, he came not
 Either in form or fame, within my range.

Ord. The sum then is that my raw overture,
 Obtain'd a gracious welcome, which in time
 May turn to profit ; that the way is clear'd
 For riper confidence ; that due regard
 Is fix'd on means of action, should events
 Warrant a bolder course, but for the hour
 A patient vigil must our watchword be.

Fos. Bro. Just so : nor more, nor less. I leave you now,
 Yours ever, spur and sword. [Exit.

GODWYN *enters.*

Ord. Hail ! worthy Thane !

You seek me in good season ; we have met
Of late but rarely ; friendly words exchanged
At growing intervals scarce serve to feed
That kindly warmth which else might starve outright.
Thrice welcome ! what's the news ?

Godw. But little change

Since last we met. Alas ! the brightest star
Is shaken from our firmament, whether
Extinct till doomsday, or to reappear
Among his cheerless subjects, who can say ?
Still do I cling to hope, though forced to own
That lapse of days and tongueless incidents
Tell silently against me.

Ord. I admire

Your loyal faith, that, sitting with closed doors,
Opposes all intrusion, nor would let
A fact or wand'ring doubt find entrance there.

It does you honour. My affections act
 With milder sway. I take for starting-point
 What I must needs lament, th'undoubted fact
 Of Alfred's disappearance: is he dead?
 The crown is in demise;—absconded? Still
 The crown is vacant.

Godw. Not while one fair doubt
 O'erhangs the cause, which may have birth in force.

Ord. A reasonable plea, I grant, but not without
 Its limits; weeks have pass'd; no sign of life;
 Each day's inquiry, like the day itself,
 Subsides in darkness; there must be a term
 To this strange inter-reign: how many weeks,
 Good Thane, or months, or years, would you assign?

Godw. 'Tis hard to say—but while a chance remains,
 That chance should be the King's.

Ord. What then, are State
 And Church, and people, all, to go for nothing?

Godw. To go for nothing? God forbid! but ways-
 There are, and now in practice, as you know,
 To meet our present wants. They may be made
 Yet better; none more fit to make them so
 Than you, my noble friend.

Ord. Think you our folk
 Will long submit to Council-government?
 Think you the Danes set not a wakeful eye
 On this prolong'd disorder of our State?
 Believe me, best of thanes, we lean upon
 A brittle reed, and much I fear we soon
 Shall reach the precipice's giddy verge.

Godw. Earl! there's another rock precipitous, 21
 Call'd by some name at Rome, which oft has proved
 The goal of tow'ring thoughts,—may you keep clear
 Of that dread eminence, and live to see
 Our own good Alfred on his throne once more.

Ord. What mean you? Am I thought to run a
 course
 Which leads to that famed rock?

Godw. A friend I came,
 And as a friend I speak. There are who talk
 More freely of your aims than I approve ;
 Some go so far, I hear, as to pretend
 A knowledge of your doings ; for myself,
 I neither have, nor seek such knowledge ; all
 I aim at is your welfare ; blame me not,
 If zeal, as oft it does, has play'd me false,
 But poise my friendly hint, as suits you best. [*Exit.*

Ord. We differ,—but I love him : knows he more
 Than prudence utters ?—e'en if so, I'm safe.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Room in ALFRED'S Palace.*

GODWYN and CEDRIC.

Cedric. I hope, good Thane, the purpose will atone
 For this my coming ; if not so, yourself,
 u/ Excuse the word, has more to answer for
 Than I, who come, encouraged by the fame
 Of your kind sympathy with want and grief.

Godwyn. All suffer late or soon ; can he be man
 Who feels no sorrow but his own ? Your name ?

Cedric. Cedric, of Saxon race, a free man born ;
 To Heav'n I owe in this our English realm
 A yeoman's state ; and deeply do I feel
 The heavy dole which weighs upon us all
 Since our great chief so darkly disappear'd.
 Goads of my own I have to prick me on,

And thus impell'd I nurse an ardent wish,
 E'en at life's peril, to discover what
 Has caused, and what, if possible, may stanch
 A wound so large: this would I fain make known
 To Alfred's Queen, if, haply, you would take
 Her royal pleasure; words, a very few,
 From one like me resolved might rouse her mind
 And bring to thought some clue to guide my steps.

Godw. Your zeal, your purpose, both, engage me:
 wait,

I pray you, here awhile; at my return
 You shall know more.

[*Exit.*

Cedric. Poor Hilda! so entrapp'd!
 So sharply tried! so perill'd! so forlorn!
 And I so mock'd! so helpless!—no resource
 But vengeance—doubtful—distant—Out on man!
 False, profligate, and cruel! would I were
 But front to front with that base kingly slave,
 The would-be ravisher! or club, or sword,
 One light'ning stroke should bring him down, and leave

A bloody warning for all times to come.

Christ, be my help!

Re-enter GODWYN.

Godw. The Queen will see you, Sir,
In presence only of my wife and me.

The way lies here ; come on. We've all to hope.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II.—*The Queen's Apartment.*

QUEEN and LADY GODWYN.

Enter GODWYN and CEDRIC.

Queen. I've learnt your purpose, Cedric, and approve ;
What can I do to speed it ?

Cedric. Your assent,
Imperial Lady, next to Heav'n's high grace,
Sustains my resolution, which to work
Needs knowledge more than I can boast of yet.
Means lag behind desire ; we seek with pains
But see not whither to direct our search.

He lives, I doubt not ;—where ? the mystery
 Lies in that word ; has memory no shred,
 No remnant of discourse, no faded hint
 Of what might chance in troubled times to prove
 A hold, a hiding-place, a close retreat ?
 Who, Lady, if not you, may hope to guard
 In fond affection's never-failing stores
 A pearl so precious now ? Forgive, my Queen,
 If zeal too rash has touch'd those holy founts,
 Whence gush the tears true sorrow loves to hide.

Godw. Hush ! friend, no more just now : grief must
 have way,
 A pregnant thoughtfulness may then succeed,
 And yield the gem you seek.

Queen. Oh ! dear one, lost
 To sight, but living still to hope and love,
 Tears are thy due, but cares that cannot rest
 Till thou art found, and search, and toil and risk
 By every sacred tie yet more are thine.
 Be sure, brave youth, we pause not :—Turn, oh ! turn

Back on yourselves, my thoughts ; and if there be
 A spot, a shelter'd nook in your domain
 Where memory slumbers, wake the lazy pow'r,
 And bring once more to light its long-past dreams.
 Deep ! deep !—a glimmer in the depths—but faint,
 So faint, ere caught it fades,—again, and now
 It gathers shape—Stay, phantom !—is there not
 Somewhere in this our realm, anent the west,
 A sort of inland isle, where waters creep
 Beneath the gloom of thick o'erclust'ring boughs,
 And leave no entrance or to foot or eye
 Unaided ?—hark ! methinks, a voice—his own—
 Or, so to say, its shadow flits across
 My charm-touch'd ear, and chases doubt away.
 Cedric ! 'tis here, the clue—pursue it—quick !
 If aught thou need'st to wing thy half-fledged task,
 Our trusty Godwyn, so the means be ours,
 Will plume it out—farewell ! Be Heav'n thy guide !
 [*Exeunt* QUEEN and LADY GODWYN.

Godw. Seize but one link, and memory's chain entire
 Soon comes to hand : my bosom's glow would seem

An earnest of success : now, gallant Cedric ! now
 Declare your wants,—your wishes,—both shall have
 My instant care.

Cedric. Nor want, nor wish have I,
 Save one that scorches in the handling, Thane !
 Natheless, come forth it must. I love ; and she,
 Whose heart holds mine, deserves more love than I
 Or hundred others lay on beauty's shrine.
 We are betrothed, but sever'd, yea, far worse,—
 Cajoled, betray'd she writhes within the net
 Around her cast by the polluting hands
 Of Guthrun, the crown'd Dane ; nor force, nor art
 Will taint her spotless mind,—of that I'm sure,—
 But what may else betide, let others guess :—
 Vain all my efforts ; what remains of hope
 On me depends no more : revenge, naught else,
 I crave, and that brim-full, press'd down I'll have,
 Or perish in the seeking : you, perchance,
 Need no entreaty, your kind lady none,
 Should my heart's treasure, should my Hilda claim
 Your shelt'ring aid. Behold my one fond wish !

Godw. My word is pledge ; to hearts like yours what more ?

SCENE III.—*Isle of Athelnay.—Landing-place.*

CEDRIC and BOATMAN.

Boatman. You see I've kept my word, and landed
you
Just as I said ; what's more, no splash, no stain
To harm your dress, and, truth to say, our mud
Leaves where it falls a mark not soon rubb'd out.

Cedric. Granted : you've brought me safe, and kept
me clean ;
Two services, both good ; but why such rubs
At first, such mutterings, such chafferings ?

Boatman. How should I know you ? people of all
kinds,
Saxon and Dane, and clerk and lay flock here
To pass the swamp and save themselves the round,

My boat their only bridge : no harm in that,—
 Who seeks the *isle*, must show his *who* and *why*.
 Your name when sounded, was enough for me—
 Who knows not Cedric ?

Cedric. Care and grief of heart,
 Toil and rough usage have so changed the man
 He barely knows himself—but what of that ?
 You are well up in country news, no doubt,
 So many as you say, of various kinds
 Owe to your boat their passage—Nothing yet
 Of Alfred ?—Strange ! the Saxons, sure, must miss
 Their royal chief—and then the Danes—what game
 Mean they to play ?

Boatman. Aye, aye, no lack, that's clear,
 Of troubled waters : little stir as yet
 Amongst the Danes—they bide their time, I guess,
 And muster for a swoop—the Saxons fret
 And wonder—let them feel their loss—'twere well
 They did. A whisper runs that some great Earl
 Would seat another king on Alfred's throne,—

He dead, or living.—Would we had him here !
 A famous hiding-place, this isle of ours ;
 What 'twixt the forest and the swamp, you see,
 An army, none suspecting, might encamp,
 And rush at bidding on a drowsy foe,
 Just like a flood.

Cedric. Well thought of,—but your king,
 And where your army ?

Boatman. That concerns me not ;
 Too poor and ignorant am I for aught
 But this my little skiff, although I have
 My notions, nor should wonder much to learn
 That you had found what others seek in vain.

Cedric. How so ? you deal in riddles.

Boatman. Never mind :
 Up yonder there you'll hit upon a youth
 Whom weeks, it may be months ago, I row'd
 Across the swamp ; he was not what he seem'd—

And may be worth your noting—if you're wise,
 One word's as good as bushels ; other fare
 Must I look out for now,—my bread's at stake.

Cedric. He's gone ; by nature shrewd he delves, at
 guess,

Deeper than some whose garments promise more.
 What ! can it be ? is luck so bravely mine
 That I should fall at once both on the place
 And on the king himself ?—My guardian saint,
 If so, must be an abler one than any
 Enroll'd at Rome :—Yes, dearest Hilda ! thou,
 Thou only on my rough and weary path,
 Starlike, hast shone—oh ! may thy guiding ray
 Stop now, where most I wish it—Stay, who comes ?
 Mine eyes are traitors if it be not he—
 The Youth ;—a noble air, though meanly clad.
 He marks me not. I'll step aside. [Retires.

Alfred. Ah ! me !

This menial life would choke me, were it not
 The narrow path that leads in hope to spheres

Of brightest eminence : one stage is reach'd,—
 The triumph o'er myself,—another ought
 To be, or nearly so, achieved ; the want
 Of kingly rule, and danger thence have had
 Their due effect ; my prayer, it seems, is heard,
 Health reigns in mind and frame ; the fire of youth,
 Quell'd to a spark, now freshen'd upward springs.
 I long for action—long to reappear
 In arms, and council, firm in conscious strength
 As, erst at Ashdune, when the Danish hosts
 Shrank from the field, or drench'd it with their blood.

CEDRIC comes forward.

Cedric. My chief ! my King ! let this submissive knee
 Be sign of that return to loyal trust
 Needed so much. I've heard enough to prove
 That noble minds can wear a mean disguise,
 And still be noble.

Alfred. Tell me who thou art
 With sight so keen as to espy the mind,
 Whate'er the dress that covers flesh and blood.

Cedric. Cedric, a Saxon, free-born yeoman, well
To do with this world's gear, but grieved at heart
For ills and wrongs,—his country's and his own.

Alfred. Your own too? both, is hard.

Cedric. Too well they mix.

Alfred. Strong cause to draw you hither?

Cedric. None more strong,—
Your comfort and deliv'rance.

Alfred. Shut from sight,
And known to few is this lone savage isle.
I marvel how you heard of it—of me
Still more.

Cedric. For zeal and urgent motive night
Hath stars that guide the houseless; where the wild
That shows not by some track, or broken ground,
Sole tree, or ruin'd shed, the whereabouts,

Object of eager search and keen desire?
 Wayfaring hardships may be left untold;
 Yourself has plumb'd them all. From love's pure depths
 First sprang the dawn, which like a silvery haze
 Insensibly expanding at each step
 Gain'd on my sight and glimmer'd into day.

Alfred. You saw the Queen? in health? our children too?

Cedric. As heart could wish, save what your quick return
 Will best dispel.

Alfred. Now homeward: come with me!
 All equal here as in the womb and grave;
 Shame, if our tongues are idle on the way.!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*A room in Guthrun's Palace.*

GUTHRUN and HILDA.

Guth. This obstinacy, Hilda, wakes my wrath:
 You know the love I bear you; if I sin,

There lies the cause, and you are more to blame
For being lovely, than for loving, I.

Hilda. But, Sir, you know I have no heart to give :
I loved another, and had pledged my vow
Long ere you deign'd to look on me. What love
Is that, which would by breach of plighted faith
The object of its fond devotion blast,
And plunge her deep in misery and shame ?

Guth. If he, who holds you to your vow, returns
In full your love for him, he would rejoice
To see you raised so far above the sphere
Which limits him ; too young, too ignorant
Were you to make a life-long choice, when he
Surprised your maiden innocence, and thought
By thoughtless vows to bind you to his fate.

Hilda. Say you my Cedric caught me by surprise ?
Nay, nay, he woo'd as honest lovers woo,
And made me his by teaching me to prize
The mine of worth that in his bosom glows.

You know him to be brave; I know him true,
 And good,—it might be great,—fit e'en to wear
 The crown your bounty fain would share with me.

Guth. Well, he's perfection—let that pass—but you,
 The daughter of a Dane—of one, whose arm
 Was dyed with Saxon gore, who fell a prey
 To Saxon bowmen, say, would you submit
 Your wealth of nature's all-surpassing charms
 To a poor Saxon yeoman's household rule?

Hilda. A Saxon was my mother; more than that,
 She lived a Christian, and her faith is mine.
 If other ties than those of heart can bind,
 Sure, these may plead, and with affection link'd
 May reign supreme, by sordid views unstain'd.

Guth. Bethink thee well, proud girl—I need not sue;
 You're in my pow'r—a word, and force might seize
 What love and love's blind fondness fail to win.

Hilda. Thou dar'st not, King! thou canst not stoop so low

Thy nature, weak, not bad, restrains thy will.
 But were it other, I have means wherewith
 To save my honour, though at cost of life.
 Stand off, I say, stand off!

Guth. (apart). I feel abash'd ;
 'Tis not the dagger—'tis not love's revenge :
 Her maiden virtue masters my intent,
 And leaves me baffled—cow'd, but little cured.

WOLFRIDA without.

Wolf. Stop me ! he's bold who dares it ; knaves ! away !
 My hand's upon the door—I ask no leave—
 Off ! off ! (*Enters.*) In time, I see, but nothing more.
 In woman's right, in right of kingly blood,
 Of gifted sight, and confidence abused,
 I come, King Guthrun ; yes, let be what may,
 I'll do what conscience bids. Sweet innocence,
 Thou loved and loving blossom of the tree,
 Emblem of life, that fresh from nature's hand,
 Once grew,—I know not when or even where,—
 In some unfading garden—what a den

To find thee in!—thy goodness wafts indeed
 An airy fragrance, but the grosser fumes
 Cling round, and make it almost pain to breathe.
 Tyrant! I little thought what fiendish lust
 Raged in thy veins, when with seductive words
 And soft dissembling tone thou mad'st me share
 Unconsciously thy fraud, and lure yon dove
 To fold its wings in this, thy harlot cage.
 Foul bird of prey! thy talons ne'er shall rend
 A breast so pure; her trust in me betray'd
 Its guileless sympathies; a holier trust
 Shall with my aid, now burst her prison bars.
 Nay—stir not, King!—a hundred Danes, well arm'd
 And mindful of my father's dread renown,
 Stand in the court below;—a sign, a cry
 Will launch them from their post, and once inflamed
 They'll free thy thrall, nor, haply, spare thyself.
 Go forth, my child! I follow. Nobler cares
 Demand thee, King!—I say again, *Prepare!*

SCENE V.—*A room in Earl Ordolf's house.*

Ord. (*alone*). Still reigns the mystery ! It reigns alone—

An empty throne,—no king to fill it,—he,—
 Its latest occupant,—a shade—a name—
 In substance nothing but a cloak for those,
 Who losing him lose all, who in their arms
 Would clasp a skeleton,—would hug a ghost,
 Liefer than quit their hold upon a chance,
 That flatters selfish hope, but bares the State
 To fearful perils. True, I entertain
 Views of my own, but all apart from them
 'Twere base to see, and feel and lavish groans
 Upon my country's jeopardy, nor raise
 Hand, foot, or voice to ward the mischief off.
 Would I succeed, 'tis time for more than words.
 If one prince plays the laggard, why not try
 Another ? I'm resolved ; no turning back.
 Who knocks ?

[*Enter his FOSTER-BROTHER.*

Dear brother of the breast, you come
 Just as my wish invited,—thoughts long nursed,

Now moulded into shape, for action ripe,
 Have need of issue. Think you not the hour
 Has all but struck for bringing into light
 Our secret plans? You hesitate. What is't
 That chills you, makes your cheek turn pale, and stints
 Your wonted breathing?

Fos. Bro. Much I fear our plans
 Require no light from us to make them known.
 The Queen, the Council—so my spies report—
 Have track'd them home, your freedom is at stake.
 It may be worse hereafter. If you fly,
 No time is to be lost.

Ord. Fly? To the Danes?
 That may not be—Fly? Whither else!

Fos. Bro. Is there
 No faithful hind, whose cottage might afford
 Concealment, like King Alfred's—till the rage,
 Blown into flame, abates?

Ord. 'Tis possible ;

But stay, behind the hangings, visible
To none, there is a door which opens out
Into the distance. Hark ! What steps approach ?
A moment wait—the key—the key. My God !
The key's not here ! I'm lost ! Oh ! fatal chance !

(Loud knocking is heard.)

Fos. Bro. How now ? What means this violence
We come.

Enter OFFICER and GUARDS.

Off. An order from the Council to arrest
Earl Ordolf and his foster-brother. You,
Brave sirs, I may presume, are those we seek.

Ord. We are ; but shew your warrant.

Off. There it is
You have your right ; we brook no more delay,
Nor would use force, though come with us you must.

Ord. Lead on ; we follow. What have we to fear ?

[Exeunt.]

SCENE VI.—*Room in Alfred's Palace.*

The QUEEN, GODWYN, and his LADY.

Godw. Madam ! There's one without, a Saxon youth,
Who waits your pleasure. Cedric is his name ;
You may remember.

Queen. Yes : he must have news
To cheer, or, it may be, to break my heart.
Let him approach. I've learnt to hear the worst.
[*Enter CEDRIC.*

What news, good Cedric ? say.

Ced. Be judge yourself.
Great Queen ! I've seen him—seen him full of life,
Of life and spirits.

Queen. Does he live indeed ?
And lives he like himself ?

Cedric. Aye, crown'd with hope,
And throned on faith—king, husband, father, all.

Queen. My heart ! it swells to bursting : what few tears

Sorrow hath left me, sparkle into those
 Of gladness, which the vulgar signs of joy
 But ill express. Oh ! teach me, gracious Heav'n !
 To store the gems, and ever trust in Thee.
 I cannot doubt, yet feel as in a dream ;
 The rapture dazzles—it forbids repose.
 I must have rest awhile ; but ere I go,
 Cedric, there's news, good news, I deem, for you :
 Hilda is here ; the rest I leave to him,
 My faithful Thane, who knows to say and do.

[Exit with LADY GODWYN.]

Godw. Brave yeoman ! well have you redeem'd your
 pledge.

The life, you've brought to light, is life to all
 Of Saxon blood. When think you he will come ?

Cedric. 'Twould seem he has it first at heart to keep
 The shade, some few excepted, till a force,
 Prepared in secret by his Thanes and Earls,
 Shall wait his kingly pleasure : more than that
 Would be mere guess ; but if the Mercian Danes

Were taken by surprise, a valiant band,
 Though small, might strike them down, and clear the
 land.

On you, and some like you, he counts for means.
 Your slave am I to pass from post to post
 Unnoticed, and convey such wise behests
 As the worst case may need; and when the hour
 Of conflict comes, to play a soldier's part.

Godw. Would that a worthier had the trust! but I
 Decline no service by the King imposed.
 He knows his folk, and ever seeks their weal.
 Great is the work in view. You need repose,
 And meditation I; to waste the time
 Were loss to both: ere long you'll hear from me.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VII.—*Danulph's Cottage.*

ALFRED and CEDRIC.

Alfred. Well, Cedric, weeks have pass'd—I wonder
 not:

R

In matters of great import, word and deed
 Fill wide extents of time. How left you those
 Whose health and ease are dearest to my heart?
 What spirit reigns where I in other days
 Held pow'r unshared? How are my Earls and Thanes
 Affected? May I look to the command
 Of numbers, on whose zeal and discipline,
 With arms and skill to use them I may count?
 Let me know all—much force in knowledge dwells,
 Better to know one's weakness than to lean
 On fancied strength, when battle is the test.

Cedric. All, all in fulness to your wish, my King.
 All that your heart desires for hearth and throne.
 The people crave your presence, and the few,
 The very few, who know you live, and live
 For them, are eager to enroll their names,
 And rush to combat where your banner floats.
 Your nobles, all with one exception, share
 The general impulse, and that one is caged
 By order of the Council; treason is
 The charge; the traitor Ordolf; troops are held

In secret readiness ; the Danes appear
 Like wayworn pilgrims, lost to all but sleep.
 One royal word, and as the solar ray,
 Shot from eclipse, relumes the drowsy world,
 All hearts will leap responsive to the sound.

Alfred. Well said, my trusty yeoman ; if all hearts
 Beat true as thine, the day 's already won.
 Yet hurry speeds not ; I must see my Earls,—
 Such as would hold commands of confidence ;
 Myself must view the Danish camp ; so great
 Our stake, I may not leave a rush to chance.
 By forest paths, disguised, and if not lone,
 Attended sparingly, my friends must come.
 The Danes may doze, but dog-like, and once roused
 They lack not eyes and ears to serve them well.
 As for my visit to their camp, I too
 Must cloak my person, and assume a form
 So distant from my own, that never thought
 Of hostile fraud would cross the observer's brain.

Cedric. No grander scheme, but daring to excess ;

Detection would be ruin ; bright, my Liege !
 Bright is your star, but fortune might resent
 A trial of her favour so extreme.
 Prudence, excuse my boldness, is a pearl
 That falling from the crown, discredits him
 Who wears the crown ; reflect, oh ! deign reflect ;
 Nor wrong by rash emprise a glorious cause.

Alfred. Trust me, I've weigh'd it well: God's boon of
 life

I ne'er would idly waste,—but when I hear
 The still small voice that whispers from within,
 My spur is duty, and the glitt'ring prize
 That tempts my grasp, outshines the love of self.

Cedric. The best may soar too high ; no mind can spurn
 Fair reason's level, and eschew the cost.

Alfred. Attend and judge.

Cedric. My fealty leaves no choice.

Alfred. The praise of heroes sounded on the harp

Acts as a charm where'er the Norseman breathes.
 To him the bard,—a sort of Pagan saint,—
 Seems half divine, and when the slumb'ring chords
 Break into music, what but awe feels he?
 Those chords obey my hand; a harper's garb
 With beard and mien assorting,—have no fear,—
 Will bear me through, and ruin to the blind
 Will follow close to justify the fraud.
 Now go we on; I see the worthy pair
 Hard by their door, she somewhat less the shrew
 Than when you left. Remember I'm a thane,
 So they conceive; nor may they yet know more.
 Good morrow, worthy friends, here's Cedric come
 To greet you both; his tidings have enlarged
 My spirit; absence has not chill'd the love
 By kindred blood inspired.

Dan. We share your joy;
 Cedric, you're welcome.

Githra. That was mine to say,
 But I'm your echo.

Alfred. Goody, where's the harp
 I've touch'd at times to soothe you? 'tis my whim
 To wake it now, that Cedric may report
 How sweet are *echoes* in this isle of yours.

Githra. Behold, my thane, the harp, and with it see
 The garment by its last possessor left.

Alfred. The harp wants tuning, but the dress, good
 dame,
 Shines out like new : what will not cleanly taste
 And a brisk hand effect ?

Githra. Aye, aye, in truth
 I've always had at heart a tidy home,
 And garniture to match.

Alfred. Were it my turn
 To lead a harper's life, there's nought to seek ;
 The full equipment here before me lies.

• END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*The Danish Camp—a large tent open in front.*

ALFRED *disguised as a Harper.* SOLDIERS.

1st Danish Soldier. Come, harper, though a Saxon,
 chiefs like you
 Are of all countries where the brave are found,
~~And valiant deeds deserve the meed of song.~~
 My comrades bid you welcome; they have hearts
 Attuned to warlike notes,—and amorous too.

Alfred. My harp and I attend you; both require
 Indulgence, but the wish to please you all
 Will stir the little skill my fingers own.

Sundry Voices. Hurrah! for harp and harper!

2nd Danish Soldier. Not so fast;
 Many like me, may love the harp, but still

Detest the harper :—Saxons,—harp or not,—
 To Danish taste are sour,—and fitter far
 To smart beneath our blows than court our ears.
 Had I my will, he should not long—a spy
 It may be—taint this camp of ours.

1st Soldier. Danes as we are, such hate and rude
 distrust,
 Ill-timed at least, would shame us.—Sit you down,
 Good man, and feel amongst us as at home.
 The dust upon your feet too plainly shows
 Much travel,—breathe awhile—a cup of mead
 Will rouse your spirits.

Alfred. Thanks : I drink to all,
 And pray my harp prove worthy of your cheer.

*[Runs his hands over the strings by way of prelude
 —and then sings.]*

Harp ! whose living chords return
 Every throb my bosom feels,
 When the passions fiercely burn,
 Or when languor o'er them steals.

Harp that whereso'er my feet
 Press the turf or serried street,
 Never quits me—comrade true—
 Gentle friends ! like one of you.

Harp ! that loves on sounding strings
 High the hero's name to raise,
 While the bard in rapture flings
 O'er that name the wreaths of praise.
 Kings and Chiefs of Northern race,
 Strong in battle, swift in chase,
 Lords of many a conquer'd land,
 Oft thy loudest tones demand.

Harp of mine ! not birth alone
 Bids the strains of glory flow ;
 Still on worth by valour shown,
 Though in rags, thy meed bestow.
 Proudest names, without a ray,
 Once in dust and darkness lay ;
 Others rife for shout and song
 Now by deeds to fame belong.

Strike the chords for churl and thane !
 Strike for every valiant Dane !

[*The Soldiers repeat the concluding distich in chorus.*]

Dan. Soldier. A proper bard ! by Thor ! a wondrous
 touch !

True as the sun,—on war's red field the brave
 Are thanes and earls of right—no care of birth :—
 No odds 'twixt life and death—they run abreast,
 And those who run with them are equal too.
 Now, lads ! for harper and for harp ; for both
 Once more a ringing cheer—Hurrah ! hurrah !

Officer entering. Hush ! fellow-soldiers, hush ! our
 royal chief
 Is close at hand : your tongues by silence best
 Will show respect where due.

Enter GUTHRUN with Military Staff.

Guth. What cause of mirth
 Have these, my Danes, to make their cheers resound

From tent to tent so loudly through the camp ?
May I not share the merriment ?

Officer. My Liege !

There's not a mood in passion but the strings
For music train'd, when delicately touch'd,
Will draw it forth, and yon poor wand'ring bard
Hath by his harp our martial sympathies
So finely probed, that joyous shouts alone
Can give full utterance to the swelling heart.
A word from you, and prouder tones will stream
From the same fount.

Guth. Well, bid the man resume
His tuneful rhapsodies,—I shall not sleep
Less sound for them,

Alfred. A kind permission given,
My harp is at your feet ; its feeble strings
Can ill repay your notice, but the hand
That makes them live, oh ! King, shall do its best.

[He strikes the harp and sings.]

Tho' half the year
 Its course had run,
In ether clear
 The summer sun
On high was proudly beaming ;
 The northern breeze
 From icy cave,
Swept o'er the seas,
 And curl'd each wave,
Whereon the light was gleaming.

Away from land
 Three hundred barks
Well-arm'd, well-mann'd
 And blithe as larks
That soar to greet the morning,
 Before the gale
 Right cheerly ran,
With crowded sail,
 As only can
The Dane, all peril scorning

On, on they dash ;
 Their banners stream ;
The surges flash ;
 The sea-birds scream ;
No fear of wreck or capture ;
 The billows rear
 Their hoary crests ;
On helm and spear
 A day-star rests,
No heart but leaps in rapture.

Now, now they reach
 The destined shore.
The night-owl's screech,
 Oft heard before,
Of blood and spoil is token ;
 Each vessel's side,
 While down they swarm,
Bends o'er the tide,
 As when by storm
A sail-press'd mast is broken.

Wide o'er their head
 Its ebon wings
 The raven spreads,
 And round them flings
 A charm that mocks at numbers,
 A charm, whose pow'r
 Is doubly felt
 In that dread hour
 When blows are dealt,
 And death the ground encumbers.

Guth. More than your hand deserves my praise and
 thanks

Brave harper! in your song a spirit glows
Which makes you kin, methinks, with those who
 wield

A sharper weapon than the harp, whose tones
Barb'd with your words, however, stir the blood
And raise new heroes to replace the dead.
Gladly, be sure, my warriors here would list
Another strain, if such your own content.

Alfred. My glory is to please, and proud am I
You deign to smile upon my simple art.

[He accompanies the harp again.]

Merrily, merrily home we go,
Merrily, merrily now go we;
Victory! victory! where's the foe?
Under the sod! where should he be?

Proudly he came, and his shafts like hail,
Busily rain'd on helm and shield;
Fled we? oh! no: not a cheek was pale;
Choice had he none but to flee or yield.

Fast fell the strokes from each Norseman's hand.
Fast on the heads of the Saxon horde;
Saxon the blood that enrich'd their land;
Victory smote with a Danish sword.

Merrily, merrily home we go,
Merrily over the briny swell;
Ask not of us whither fled the foe;
Ask of the ground, where he fought and fell.

Guth. My thanks again: I leave you with regret;

X 36/

But still more heavy should I be to quit
This pleasant land, although my native home
Lies where the raven dropt in Odin's ear
Its croaking mysteries. Take ample rest,
And should your sympathy with pride of arms
Suggest the fancy, you are free to view
Whate'er of martial order this our camp
Presents to curious notice. Fare you well!

Alfred (apart). When next we meet, brave Chieftain !
you may find
Good reason to lament that kindly wish.
Harm to thy person ?—None, but war's worst fate
To thy whole brood, and to my country peace !

SCENE II.—*Isle of Athelnay.*

ALFRED and CEDRIC.

Alfred. Not the poor menial, Cedric, but the King
Now gives you thanks ; right bravely have you earn'd
His grateful notice ; you must own the harp

Has also play'd its part, with credit too.
 For you, for me, for all who speak our tongue
 There dawns a brighter day ; may Heav'n unfold
 The budding light ! we do but seek our own.

Cedric. And I, most gracious King, have only done,
 If even that, a duty well repaid
 By your acknowledgments, and safe return.

Alfred. Attend my Nobles ?—first let Godwyn come,
[Enter GODWYN.]

Thrice welcome, loyal friend ! whose faith and zeal,
 In darkest hours shone out ; take now thy place
 On this my better hand.

Godw. Not words alone,
 Let these my tearful eyes attest the joy
 Your restoration to yourself and us
 Creates, my Liege, in every faithful heart,
 Your name is now once more a tow'r of strength.

Alfred. 'Tis well ; now, Cedric, to our presence lead

Earl Ordolf. We must not o'erlook his rank.

[Enter ORDOLF bowing to the ground.]

Nay—cast all doubt aside, most noble Earl !
 Your prompt attendance here in warlike guise
 Outweighs whate'er the Council may have learnt
 Of your distemper'd faith ; I hold them free
 Of all reproach that charge of undue haste
 In taxing you with treason might entail,
 And deem you bound to show by valorous feats
 That the realm's weal, alike in peace and war,
 Is motive to your acts : the hour, the field
 Of trial for us all is nearing fast.

[Enter other Nobles and Commanders.]

This large assembly of my trustful chiefs
 E'en to o'erflowing fills the golden cup
 I strove so long to grasp : right welcome, all !
 Your wonder err'd not when the crown and throne
 Became so darkly void ; necessity
 Of health, and danger brooding o'er the State
 Prescribed a firm resolve, beset, I own,
 With tremulous misgivings. Heav'n hath bless'd
 My self-abasement, and I now resume
 Sceptre and sword—our land's avenging sword.

By confidence in long success benumb'd,
 And fondly waiting for th' expected burst
 Of feuds fermenting here, our neighbour foes
 Are ill prepared ; a sudden blow struck home
 May quench in blood and death their dreamy hopes.
 Go to your several posts, collect your men,
 And be like slot-hounds straining on the leash,
 Till, as a lightning-flash, my word to march
 Breaks on your watchful ears ; then with like speed
 Haste to the point assign'd, where I, your King,
 Will foremost lead you on with firm array
 To one last fight and crowning victory.
 War has its chances—numberless—I know,
 But also to my knowledge—knowledge, mind !
 They at this juncture clearly side with us.
 Now speed you well !

Godw. Be sure, my gracious Lord !
 That in true time with yours our pulses beat.

An Earl. I swear it : and may Christ record the oath !

All. We swear ! we swear !

SCENE III.—*Danulf's cottage.*

ALFRED and CEDRIC.

Alfred. Well, my good yeoman, though I strive to show
 A cloudless bearing, and put trust in those
 Who hold my fate in charge, to be so near
 The hour of doom must needs with anxious awe
 My bosom fill; yet from beneath the load
 There springs a bright foreboding of success.

Cedric. Doubt not, my liege, your hope has wherewithal
 To nerve ten thousand hearts, however sunk
 In deep despair, until with you revived.

[*Enter DANULF and GITHRA.*]

Dan. Most worthy King,—for such we hear you are—
 We come, my wife and I, with humble pray'r
 To beg forgiveness—Dolts we must remain
 Despite your pardon—oh! let that reproach
 Appease your anger—what queer eyes are ours
 That stopp'd at outward lendings, nor could spy
 The kingly mien beneath a peasant's dress.

Alfred. You cannot win my pardon,—none have I

To grant where no offence was giv'n ; the dress
 Had miss'd its object, if your sight had pierced
 The rough disguise, and gaged the man within.
 In lieu of pardon, count on my esteem ;
 You wore no mask to hide your native sense
 And ever honest purpose ! but from you,
 Dame Githra, pardon, though on knees implored,
 May justly be withheld ; can you suppose
 That any lapse of ages will erase
 Th' impression made upon this ear of mine
 By your loose tongue, and by your weighty hand ?
 What ! scold and strike your lawful prince !

Githra. Alack !

I knew you not, my Liege ! and only thought
 To rouse a menial, whose dull negligence
 Spoil'd the best cake 'twas e'er my lot to knead.

Alfred. I might accept th' excuse, but much I fear
 The law will prove less placable, and death
 May not be deem'd too harsh a penalty.

Githra. Oh ! dear ! oh ! dear ! what, kill me for a cuff !

Alfred. A lenient judge might, haply, be content
To lop the guilty hand.

Githra. Lenient forsooth !
Take my best weapon !—thanks—I'd rather die.

Alfred. Surely, not so : he would not take your tongue,
And that's a weapon quite enough for one.

Githra. Wretch that I am ! what more ?

Dan. Poor woman ! see,
She's nearly lunatic : Oh ! pray, my Lord,
Remember how her cheek received in turn
Good payment for the cuff so freely dealt.
Milder of late she is, and now, when vex'd,
No lamb more gentle than she means to be.

Alfred. Come, goody lamb, your husband shall not plead
In vain. We drop the past, and bid you laugh
At this our wanton, solemn merriment.—
Now would I court repose ; I feel a want
Of care's best comforter ; as eve's soft shade

Creeps mantling on, to eyes o'erstrain'd by use,
 And such are mine ; how sweet is balmy sleep,
 Though kin to death. Leave me you may, good friends,
 My rest is here. [*Exeunt all but ALFRED.*

So,—I'm at last alone,
 Not quite,—for buzzing fancies haunt me still,
 And weariness but slowly steeps my brain.
 Be thou my guard, as thou hast been my guide,
 Almighty Father ! may I dream as hope
 Inspires, and wake with livelier trust in Thee.
[*He lies down and falls asleep.*

The Ghost of St. CUTHBERT appears.

St. Cuth. How calm is sleep when conscience hath no
 thorn.

Alfred ! my form and voice shall reach thy sense,
 E'en through the mists of slumber. Look and list.
 Thy pray'rs are heard, thy wise and firm resolves
 Approved on high ; thy life's exposure too,
 And Christian zeal are incense dear to Him
 Whose eye o'erlooks, whose grace revives the world.
 Gird on thy sword ; go forth in conscious might ;

My spirit, led by Him, shall move in front
 Of thy resistless ensign, whose deep fold,
 In shadow thrown before thee, shall arrest
 The Norsemen's rage ere yet the Saxons' spears
 Achieve their work; and more, the raven flag,
 Shorn of its pride, shall cower in gory dust
 Beneath the uplifted Cross, and onward still
 Thy power shall stretch, with peace and peaceful arts,
 From sea to sea athwart this bleeding isle.
 God speaks through me ! [Ghost vanishes.

ALFRED springs from his couch.

Alfred. They waver; see! they break!
 On, my brave children, on! yet once again,
 Stand to the charge, and all the field is ours.
 No dream was there: I thank thee, Holy Saint!
 Not Hermon's dew, not Aaron's oil, could more
 Refresh my soul, and brace me for the worst.

SCENE IV.—*Field of battle. Camp in the background:*

Enter KING GUTHRUN and Staff.

King Guth. The Saxons are upon us—haste and form;
 The camp is roused—our men are streaming out.

Archers to front ! your bows well plied may check
 Th' advancing columns,—every moment gain'd
 Is precious. Mass the spearmen close behind
 Our horse on either flank, and pass the word
 That strong reserves support the forward ranks.
 Surprised we are, but ready, as the foe
 Shall soon perceive. Remember ye are Danes.

Another part of the field. Enter ALFRED at the head of his guard.

King Alfred. At length the goal's in view. Brave
 countrymen,
 Behold the tented field our swords must reap !
 Now in the battle's order take your stand :
 My post is here, and o'er my helmet, mark
 To every eye, the royal standard floats.
 I read your looks—they blaze with victory.
 Charge quick—Charge home—Let no remains be left
 At our triumphal feast : God by our hands
 Will smite the pagan host. I have His word,
 Brought by St. Cuthbert's spirit to my ears

In vision of the night. Then be our cry,
God ! and St. Cuthbert ! in their names I lead.

[They raise the war-cry and rush on. Other parts of the field : bands of soldiers fighting. Enter the Danish chief HELMSTER, with a few soldiers, and Saxon prisoners bound.]

Helm. (to his soldiers). Go, some of you, and take those Saxon dogs

Beyond the battle's reach. Should fortune prove
A wanton jade, let them not live to boast,
But draw the blade across their throats, and leave
Their carrion limbs to blister in the sun.
To wring them as they die with torturing pains
Were best, but time would fail you ; now, begone !

[Exeunt.]

Since I have left my post and fail'd to meet
This Saxon king, whose person much I long
To shorten by the head, the public voice
May roughly treat me. Ho ! King Alfred, ho !
I dare thee to the fight of man with man.

[CEDRIC enters.]

Cedric. Thou braggart Dane, I too for better cause
Have sought a royal foe ; it may not be,
And here I bide to try the fate of war
At the sword's point with thee : Come, do thy worst,

Helm. I know thee not ; but since thy words provoke
A trial here in battlefield, I stand.

Cedric. Have at thee, then, with all a Saxon's hate ;—
Good sword ! thou wilt not fail me now at need.

[*Herushes at HELMSTER—they fight, HELMSTER's right
arm is paralysed by CEDRIC's blow ; he drops his
battle-axe and turns to fly, covered by his soldiers.*]

Cedric. 'Tis well ; thy life is worthless ; in thy flight
I hail the omen of a great success.

Enter EARL ORDOLF wounded, a bloody sword in his hand.

Ordolf. These Danes, I must confess, when brought to
bay,
Are deadly fighters ; witness this red blade,
'Twas hand to hand, my strength was all but spent,

When at my side a Saxon yeoman plied
His stalwart arms and hew'd the foremost down.
Stand long they cannot ; more than wonted rage
Impels our Saxons, and where Alfred's plume
Waves in the flood-like van, they drive the Danes
Before them as the tempest drives the chaff.—
What have we here ? a woman ! rather seems
A fury arm'd and seeking whom to slay !
She makes at me—what eh ? a woman's blood
Confers no glory—can I fence her off ?

[Assumes an attitude of defence. WOLFRIDA rushes on.]

Wolf. Escape thou canst not, Earl ! with Danish gore
All reeking as thou art—I know thee well,
And hate thy treason—Alfred strikes through me !

[ORDOLF falls. His FOSTER BROTHER wounds WOLFRIDA.]

Fos. Bro. Accursed hag ! thou shalt not halt behind—
My brother calls thee—to thy native hell
Go down, and vaunt thy sorceries on earth.

Wolf. (dying). I blame thee not—affection sped thy
 blow.

The life thou takest has no prize for me—

My Danes have had their day—content I die :
Waft me, oh ! waft me beyond the flood,
Where in battle of old my father stood ;
Daughter am I of an Ocean-King,
And a dirge for me shall the mermaids sing.
Faster and faster it ebbs away ;
Soon shall I know what the Nornas say ;
Raven ! thy wings overspread the skies,—
Home to Valhalla my spirit flies. [She expires.

An OFFICER enters in haste.

Off. Ho ! from the king—on yon hill-side the foe
 Still holds his own, not yet so weak but what
 The tide, thus far our own, may haply turn
 And make his sinking fortunes ours. Haste, haste ;
 A strong reserve must on the word push forth
 Swallowing the space by fleetness,—come, friends,—
 come,
 On your swords' point the nation's fate is poised.

Fos. Bro. Already see ! the word is pass'd,—they
 march.

O cruel war ! that with the slaughter'd foe

nfound the dearest treasures of our hearts,
 How must I hate thee now ! here stretcd'd in death
 Lies my kind brother of the breast. O ! loss
 To me irreparable—Comfort none—
 Suppose the field be ours, my dole of joy
 Is but a soldier's scrap,—the grief, alas !
 All, all my own, unpitied and unshared.—

[Shouts from a distance.]

*Enter ALFRED and Guards. The Royal Standard
 in their midst.*

GODWYN and CEDRIC.

Alfred. What say you ? Is their vaunted ensign ours ?
 Have we indeed their famous spell-wrought bird
 Dragg'd from his perch ?

A Voice. Oh ! yes, my Liege, and caged.

Alfred. Poor Raven ! hush'd for aye ! thy quivering
 plumes
 Shall never more give token of success,
 Or cause the air to ring with shouts of joy !
 Their loss immense ! their rout complete ! to God

How vast our debt ! and ye, my Saxons, too—
 Well have ye fought this day, and plunged beneath
 Dark Lethe's wave all baser memories, once
 Your shame and mine ! what bloody corpse is that ?
 Another too ! a woman's—War accounts
 For much, but here is something more than war
 Can on the outward showing well explain.

Fos. Bro. What scarce an hour ago was Ordolf, King !
 Lies weltering there,—he had a debt to pay,
 And payed it down like one of noble birth
 And heart to match ; yon carcass in quaint garb
 Was late a Danish witch : she slew the Earl,
 And I, his foster-brother, paid her off.

Godw. That Earl, Victorious King ! was once a friend
 I valued much, the Council on reports
 Touching his fealty placed him in restraint.
 You gave him freedom, and his gratitude
 Shone with true lustre even to his death.

Cedric. My word for that ; in the fierce battle's fror

I saw him bathed in blood of numbers slain,
 Nor dream'd for what I clear'd him space to live.
 The witch so call'd was born of royal seed,
 By name Wolfrida ; birth, a tow'ring mind,
 And wild demeanour, gave her tongue at times
 A weird o'ermastering pow'r ; she snatch'd my bride
 From urgent peril, and I mourn her fate.

Alfred. To both let due respect be shown ; the dead,
 Whate'er in life their acts, of kindred mould
 Touch us too nearly, not to move our hearts,
 And claim a sigh unsanction'd by their worth.

SCENE V.—*Saxon encampment before the Danish fortress.*

SOLDIERS on guard.

1st Sold. I wonder much these Danes are not as tired
 Of being watch'd as we of watching them.
 Weeks have gone by since their defeat, and still
 They hold the walls they fled to in despair.

2nd Sold. Wait, comrade, yet awhile ; their scanty
 stores,

Ere long, if nothing else, will bate their pride,
And bring them to our feet.

1st Sold. The sooner then,
Say I, the better ; much I long to see
How fare our wives ; this camping life gives room
For idle thoughts ; I'd rather fight than yawn.

2nd Sold. Be sure our gallant king, who fought so
well
In the great battle ; and, as some declare,
Slew with his own stout hand a score of Danes,
Will storm the fort, or bring the foe to terms
With all good speed,—the latter of the two
Most like ; yon walls are thick, and steep the hill
They stand on ; rams for breaching still to seek.

1st Sold. Well, well, old Guthrun must turn out at
last,
And then we churls will souse their pagan skulls,
And make them Christians ; better, I should hope,
Than most *of us*.

2nd Sold. What ! think you they have souls,
 Savage and cruel as they are ?—'twould take,
 I guess, the sea, o'er which they came, to wash
 The heathen out of them ; this isle of ours
 No longer needs the stranger ; native arms
 Suffice to ear it, and defend it too.

[A trumpet sounds in the distance.]

1st Sold. Ha ! something stirs ; it was not from the
 walls :
 Look out ! What see you ?

2nd Sold. 'Tis the King, I think,
 Attended by some horse, with measured pace,
 As 'twere on survey ; hitherward he bends.

1st Sold. 'Tis well we're at our post ; his eye detects
 The slightest flaw.

2nd Sold. God bless him ! Where he treads
 The grass springs up, and misery dares to hope.

Enter ALFRED with GODWYN and CEDRIC.

Alfred. Your tidings promise well ; the siege is press'd,
And our beleaguer'd Dane must feel the want
Of new supplies to feed his meagre hoard.
Better to choke him from his hold, than waste
Fresh streams of blood to hasten what is sure.
Besides, I have at heart enduring peace,
Built on fair treatment ; after-times would reap
A golden harvest, did the scheme succeed.

Godw. Pardon, my liege, but long experience warns
That fickleness and smooth dissembling front
Are the resort of Danes, their policy
When humbled by defeat,—to trust them is,
In my poor judgment, the unerring path
To vain regret and ruinous alarms.

Alfred. I grant the risk ; but oft the issue hangs
On seasonable time, meet circumstance,
And individual character, the which
Seen in the pending instance to concur,
And warrant with due care a liberal trust.

[The blast of a horn is heard.]

What means that flourish? It's from the town.
 Cedric, go see; 'twere well we knew forthwith.
 It may intend a parley: if it do,
 Spare diet is an angel, and our work
 Draws to a close. Conjecture helps us not.
 Cedric will hasten back. Lo! here he comes.
 What means the trumpet?

Cedric. Parley, nothing more.

The Danish chief would meet you, Sir, or else
 Instructed representatives from each
 Might join in conference and talk of peace.

Alfred. Good. Let him send a herald, charged with
 clear

Proposals to that purpose, and myself
 Will face the royal Dane, a flag of truce
 While here he tarries, pledging mutual faith.
 I wait his perfect leisure; need of haste
 Spurs me not on,—the siege of course maintain'd.

SCENE VI.—*King Alfred's tent.*ALFRED, GODWYN, CEDRIC, *and others.**Alf.* Comes he to-day?*Godw.* A herald, sent before,
Announces his approach ; a numerous guard
Attend his person.*Alfred.* Cause to fear, there's none ;
But prudence is of God ; we too are well
Surrounded, and our troops, all under arms,
So posted, though unseen, as to o'erwhelm
The slightest show of treachery.*A Voice.* My Lord,
King Guthrun is at hand.[*ALFRED advances to meet him.*]*Alfred.* I greet you, Sir,
With hearty welcome, glad to find in war's
Fierce energies a pause, however brief.

Guth. Think not, King Alfred, that your courtesy
Is lost in air ; the breath of public fame
Bade me expect no less ; and moved by it,
I've thrown all form aside, and come myself,
Seeking in friendly guise how best to quench
Our hostile fires in concord's strict embrace.

Alfred. My wish keeps pace with yours ; pray, rest
awhile.

My honour'd guest ; for interchange of thoughts
May cleanse the view, and dwarf th' opposing heights.
Godwyn, my thane, the King and I would now
Be left apart ; so make it understood.

[*Exeunt GODWYN and others.*]

This quiet favours confidence ; to your
Proposals, whatsoe'er they be, I lend
A willing ear.

Guth. One word conveys them, Peace.

Alfred. Agreed thus far ; but peace must rest on terms,
And yours I know not yet.

Guth. A Saxon king

Approved by me in Mercia ; I and mine
To hold a royal settlement within
Fair limits in East Anglia—this the main :
Conditions of less note to be reserved
For later balance, so that intercourse
Of friendly sort with corresponding acts
May bind us long together,—bound, yet free.

Alfred. Most frankly stated ; yes, East Anglia, I
For my own part object not ; Mercia too
Restored to Saxon rule may have my voice ;
But real independence with no taint
Of guidance from the nod of alien pow'r
Must be its rightful state. Two points remain.
No Danish occupants of land to stay
On Mercian soil ; all fresh invading bands
Of Northern origin to be repell'd
Even by force, if needed ; these to boot,
Your proffer'd terms may not be deem'd amiss.

Guth. Pardon, King Alfred ; your appended weights

To my plain offers savour of mistrust,
 And that I view as no good element
 In friendly contracts.

Alfred. Pardon me in turn ;
 Distrust of circumstances differs much
 From doubt of personal good faith, and where
 Our own position leaves no choice, we back
 Our weakness with precautionary guards:
 You aim at lasting peace, and offer terms,
 But peace to last can never rest on terms,
 Which rather court disputes than shut them out.
 Saxons and Danes, we cannot hide the truth,
 Are chronic opposites, by race and creed,—
 By language and contention kept apart,
 So must they keep, nor may the stronger folk
 Be free to ope their ports to kindred swarms.

Guth. Your plea, I grant, is plausible ; but 'Danes
 Have sympathies, and claims of right, which bare
 Authority may find it hard to thwart.

Alfred. There you are judge. I have to shapo my course

By winds that often veer, and now derive
 From late events a more than wonted force.
 Would we were like in creed ! A common faith
 Might pave the road to peace.

Guth. You mean that we
 Should turn to yours : a change as great
 Has chanced to others ; did it rest with me,
 It might again.

Alfred. If now I hail with joy
 The shadow, think how warmly I should greet
 The substance it precedes ; but that may prove
 A dream, and as we stand, the real facts
 Must on each side our joint' agreement fix.
 It lies with you to warrant on my part
 The loosening of War's stringent grasp : to you
 Not less than to myself is known the strait
 Which e'en your courage cannot long endure.
 Content am I to wait, my people's weal
 The polar star to guide/peace or war.
 Forgive my frankness.

Guth Aye, and prize it too

Farewell!

SCENE VII.—*A Grove by moonlight.*

CEDRIC and HILDA.

Hilda. Oh! what a charm is here! these tranquil
shades,

Dear Cedric! seem the very home of thoughts
Attuned like ours.

Cedric. They breathe indeed, my love,
A hallow'd peacefulness, and if they bring
Past sorrows back to mind, 'tis but to raise
The joy their presence yields.

Hilda. How sweet to hear
The whisper'd music of the leaves at play
With the young breezes: turn your eyes aloft,
And peering through the branchy loops survey
The deep blue fields of space, gemm'd o'er with lights.
Nay, see the moon, a broad one, mounting slow

From yon hill-brow ! It seems in scorn to leave
 The darkeu'd earth, and sheds a mellowing light,
 Made softer yet by the soft haze that sleeps
 On those tall elms and yonder village tower.

Hilda. My sight attends on yours ! trees, moon, and
 stars

Have each their merit, love ; but do they not
 Owe in great part their magic spell to peace ?
 This new-made peace, which takes its welcome birth
 From Alfred and from you. That modest air
 Becomes you well ; but had you not found him,
 'Tis chance he would so soon have found himself.

Cedric. Great thoughts are his, and generous. But
 hark !

What notes of music, mingled with the swell
 Of joyous voices, are at hand ; what sounds
 Of many feet, of dance, and laugh, and cheer,
 And lights that dim the stars ! Fall in we must,—
 They know us both, these villagers, and shame
 It were that we should be ashamed of them.

Enter Villagers of both sexes and all ages, with lights and music.

Cedric. Well met, dear countrymen, and women too !
 Hilda and I are with you ; peace unites,
 Peace cheers us all. How sweet that holy name !
 The pagan fiends are down ; our native fields
 Are till'd no more for them : let merry heels
 Keep measure to the beats of joy within.
 Hurrah ! for peace !

A Voice. Hurrah ! for Cedric, too !

Female Voice. And joy to Hilda ! Peace and joy to both !

They sing.

Twine the garland, maidens, twine !
 Bind it on that lovely brow !
 Well may flowers, the brightest, shine,
 Shine for her, who greets you now.
 Homage, Peace ! to thee we pay,
 Happy songs of mirth and glee ;

Wouldst thou in our bosom stay,
Love must thy companion be.

Twine the garland, maidens, twine !
Weave it bright, and weave it true !
Who can say it may not shine,
Late or soon, for each of you.

SCENE VIII.—*A hall in Alfred's palace.*

Enter ALFRED and QUEEN ELSWITHA from opposite sides.

Queen. How leave us so, my Alfred ?

Alfred. To return
With joy and health, and victory and peace !
Gone is the past : its tide has swept away
Care, grief, and fear : recall it not, my queen !
Lapp'd in our present bliss the future smiles.
No Danes to vex us, none to waste our lands,
Blaspheme the Cross, and make our homes their dens.

Queen. Thanks, thanks to God—to thee !

Alfred. Hereafter more ;

My loves attend you,—soon we met again :

The public now. [*He takes his seat on the throne.*

Earl Godwyn ! is he here ?

[*GODWYN enters.*

In this full presence, Earl ! well pleased I am

To blaze thy merits ; loyal, wise, and brave.

Thy seat is with the best : go, take it there.

Lead Cedric up : brave Thane, we owe thee much,

I and the State ; when our Great Council meets,

Thou shalt not be o'erlook'd. Ho ! Danulf, thou

Elsewhere my kindly host—an honest heart

Has nought to fear—thy sense and worth require

But slender learning—leave thy lot to me.

A Chamberlain. Sir King ! the dignitaries—Church
and State

Would, with your gracious leave, approach the throne.

Enter ARCHBISHOP and many others.

Arch. Our duties at your feet, my Liege, we come
Prepared, whether by mass or sword, to do

Your lawful hests, and now with peace, assured
 By deeds triumphant, worthy of your name,
 To second to the full whate'er of laws
 Progressive, or of institutions sound,
 Your royal wisdom may enjoin.

Alfred. Your words,
 Most reverend and right noble ! fill my heart
 With gladness and bright hopes. Our land is rich,
 Our people not behind in manly gifts ;
 And fitted, Lords, are ye by head and hand
 To take the lead in every enterprise
 Inspired by peace, and wrought for lasting good.

Chamb. Crowds of your meaner subjects, gracious
 King,
 Swarm in your Court, and raise a cry for leave
 To hail your royal self.

Alfred. Not mean, though rough :
 Admit them straight. *[They enter.]*

Spokesmen. Free liegemen, King, we've sought

This royal presence to speak out the joy
Which peace, your valour's work, bestows on all
Of Saxon blood. Yours to the death are we.

Alfred. The fealty you declare confirms the love
I bear you all. On God, the giver, rests
That peace you justly prize; on me, on you,
The charge of turning it to full account.
To know is pow'r, but first we have to learn.

Chamb. King Guthrún waits your leisure, Sir!

Alfred. My time
Is ever at his service.

GUTHRUN enters.

Guth. Good, my Lord,
State duty calls me eastward; ill it were
To leave you unadvised; accept, I pray,
This friendly deference, and be assured
That far or near I strive to realize
Your wish that Dane and Saxon should be one.



Alfred. That wish is truly mine and rooted fast
 In ground not tried before ; our peace is both
 Its gage and mean ; the crowning act remains
 In your discretion ; friends we are, but more,
 Yea, brethren we might be, did that great name,
 To which we bend, obtain your credence too.

Guth. The seed embosom'd needs but time to break
 From earth, and open into bloom ; the hearts
 Of many must be turn'd, ere one, though first,
 Can bruit with sure effect his new-born faith.

Alfred. I wait your season hopefully : farewell !

[*Exit* GUTHRUN.]

Godwyn ! come near ; my bosom is o'erfraught :
 You see by grace at length I've reach'd a height,
 Whence, looking on through time, I may provide
 In some degree for generations call'd
 By nature's law to follow this, our own.

Godw. May Heav'n such foresight bless !

Alfred. This sea-girt land
 Is destined,—can we doubt it?—to become
 The freehold of a nation, haply form'd
 Of parts distinct, but welded into one;
 Though ages first may pass away, it seems
 No mean emprise to lay at once the base
 Of what I now foreshadow,—nay, foresee.

Godw. A grand conception truly, of yourself
 A birthlike image; few there are, my Liege,
 Who care to look so far; the duller eye
 Halts at th' horizon,—self and its small round
 Th' uttermost range, and, sooth to say, I fear
 Materials even for a base are scant.

Alfred. They must be made: to you and such as you,
 To wisdom, learning, skill, wherever found,
 I must appeal,—there seek wherewith to mould
 My dreams, my longings into vital shape.
 Asser is one who stands in high repute,
 And him I would secure at once.

Godw. His fame

Is widely noised, and good indeed it were
You fix'd a man so gifted in your court.

Alfred. You have my purpose : knowledge is our want,
And that, like other objects not our own,
Must be imported ; what myself can do
In lore or science, shall not tarry ; still
My leisure is an islet in the midst
Of restless waters, smoother than their wont
Just now, but never safe from storm and flood.
Our social customs, and our Saxon laws,
Dating from eld, retain such healthy seeds
That taking root, and spreading o'er the land,
~~With growth of pow'r, and zeal of Christian love,~~
Our race in after-years may head the world,
And render boundless service to mankind.

Godw. Your thoughts, my King, are eagles ; high they
soar,
And, lost in distance, carry on their wings
The light they blench not : I can only store

The hopes they waken, and with loving gaze
Pursue the meteor-track that marks their flight.

Alfred. No seer am I, but from the vantage-ground
I stand on, as a nation's chief, my ken,—
No room for boasting,—takes a wider range
Than else it would command; the nation's life
Extending,—link on link as by a chain
To the far reach of time, I do but strive
To square my view with its grand destinies—
Girt by the seas, we must have fleets to guard
Our naked coasts, and line them with the gold
Of wealthier lands; at home we must create
Seats of embower'd peace, where undisturb'd
Fair Science and the Muses, all, may dwell.
Some part is done already; Danish flags
Have stoop'd to ours at sea, and Danes have learnt
Enough to shake their pride of empire there.
On the green bank of that clear stream which flows
With gentle windings thro' my native meads,
I look to rear,—nor is the day remote,—
A comely structure, whence, in later years,

Example taking, statelier tow'rs shall rise,
 And all my fairest, fondest dreams fulfil
 By social grades, by local bounds confirm'd
 Shall order reign, surmounting many a shock ;
 And Law, by freedom train'd, by use matured,
 May haply bear some trace of Alfred's mind

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IX.—*Nave of a Saxon church—the high altar
 in front; workmen putting the last finish to its
 decorations.*

Enter the SACRISTAN and VERGER.

Sacristan. So much fond talk of late, one hardly
 knows

What to believe ; what, not ; it seems that peace
 Unties our tongues, and makes them wag so fast
 That the poor brain turns laggard.

Verger. Better far
 To hunger than to feed on lies : your thoughts,
 I guess, are running on the Danes, so long

Our heathen neighbours ; now, in sooth, it seems
 Our fellow-Christians ! Bless the mark ! Go to !
 Baptize them to the chin, they're Ethiops still.

Sac. I'd liefer they had gone to worship blocks
 Of wood and stone at home.

Ver. That well may be ;
 But mind ! their king and ours have now join'd heads
 In princely concert ; hence these preparations.

Ver. All done, the sight will be a brave one.

Sac. Aye :

And the procession—think of that ! with flags
 And music, mitres, helmets, coronets,
 Crosiers and crucifixes,—a long stream
 Of dignitaries, rich in clothing, bright
 With jewelry, and most in some way famed.

Ver. Pity, the Dane himself will not appear ;
 It may be that remembrance of late rubs

Gives him a touch of shyness, or perhaps
He's not as yet well up in Christian forms.

Sac. Whate'er his cause of absence, rest assured
King Alfred knows it; early days it were
For mischief; and you know the Danes are tamed.
Our own brave king at all events will take
His fitting station, and the Archbishop heads
His prelate flock.

Ver. Indeed!

Sac. Now talk must end :
The workmen leave, and we must clear the church.

*[After an interval the Procession enters and moves
along the nave. First voices ahead ; the two
choirs on each side, singing in turn the different
parts of the hymn.]*

Recitative.

With hearts subdued and humble strain
We enter now this holy fane.

A 176!

A presence here, that leaves in shade
All earthly grandeur, doom'd to fade,
Rebukes the swell of human pride,
And seems our very bliss to chide.

Yet must these hallow'd walls repeat
The notes of praise that have their seat
Where all our cares on God repose,
And gratitude with rapture glows.
Oh! let our chasten'd voices rise,
And find an echo in the skies.

First Choir.

Proud are we a place to hold
In the kingly Shepherd's fold,
Glad to follow where his crook
Beckons o'er the wayside brook.

Hail we now another flock
Thirsting 'round the stricken rock,
Panting, bleating, see them rush
Where the living waters gush.

Some there are who freely drink,
 Bending o'er the dewy brink :
 May the lips that waver still
 Find and quaff the healing rill !
 Hand in hand
 On the land
 Steep'd in blood before
 Now we meet
 'Round the seat
 Mercy quits no more.

Second Choir.

Lift the Cross, and sound the name
 Blazing from that tree of shame !
 Christ ! to whom we sons of earth
 Owe the true, the second birth !

Let thy loving arms embrace
 All of earth, whate'er the race !
 Fold within that hallow'd round
 All who breathe on Saxon ground !

Lord of yonder shining spheres,
 Borne along the lapse of years !
 Lord of souls that ever draw
 Life from thy undying law !

Hear ! oh ! hear !
 Lend thine ear
 To the hymns that o'er us mount !
 Vows we bring,
 Vows that spring
 From the heart's out-welling fount.

The whole Choir.

Again, again
 With joyous strain
 Soaring high our voices ring ;
 Loud songs of praise
 We raise, we raise,
 To the Great Eternal King.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

JAN 10 1942

23498.36.4

Alfred the great in Athelney;

Widener Library

003726353



3 2044 086 869 286